Jules Verne

EXTRAORDINARY

VOYAGES

THE MYSTERIOUS

ISLAND

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Table of Contents

Jules Verne THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

Table of Contents

PART 1 THE AIR WARLAKES

- CHAPTER I
- CHAPTER II
- CHAPTER III
- CHAPTER IV
- CHAPTER V
- CHAPTER VI
- CHAPTER VII
- CHAPTER VIII
- CHAPTER IX
- CHAPTER X
- CHAPTER XI
- CHAPTER XII
- CHAPTER XIII
- CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER XIX

CHAPTER XX

CHAPTER XXI

CHAPTER XXII

PART 2 THE ABANDONED

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER XIX

CHAPTER XX

PART 3 THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER XIX

CHAPTER XX

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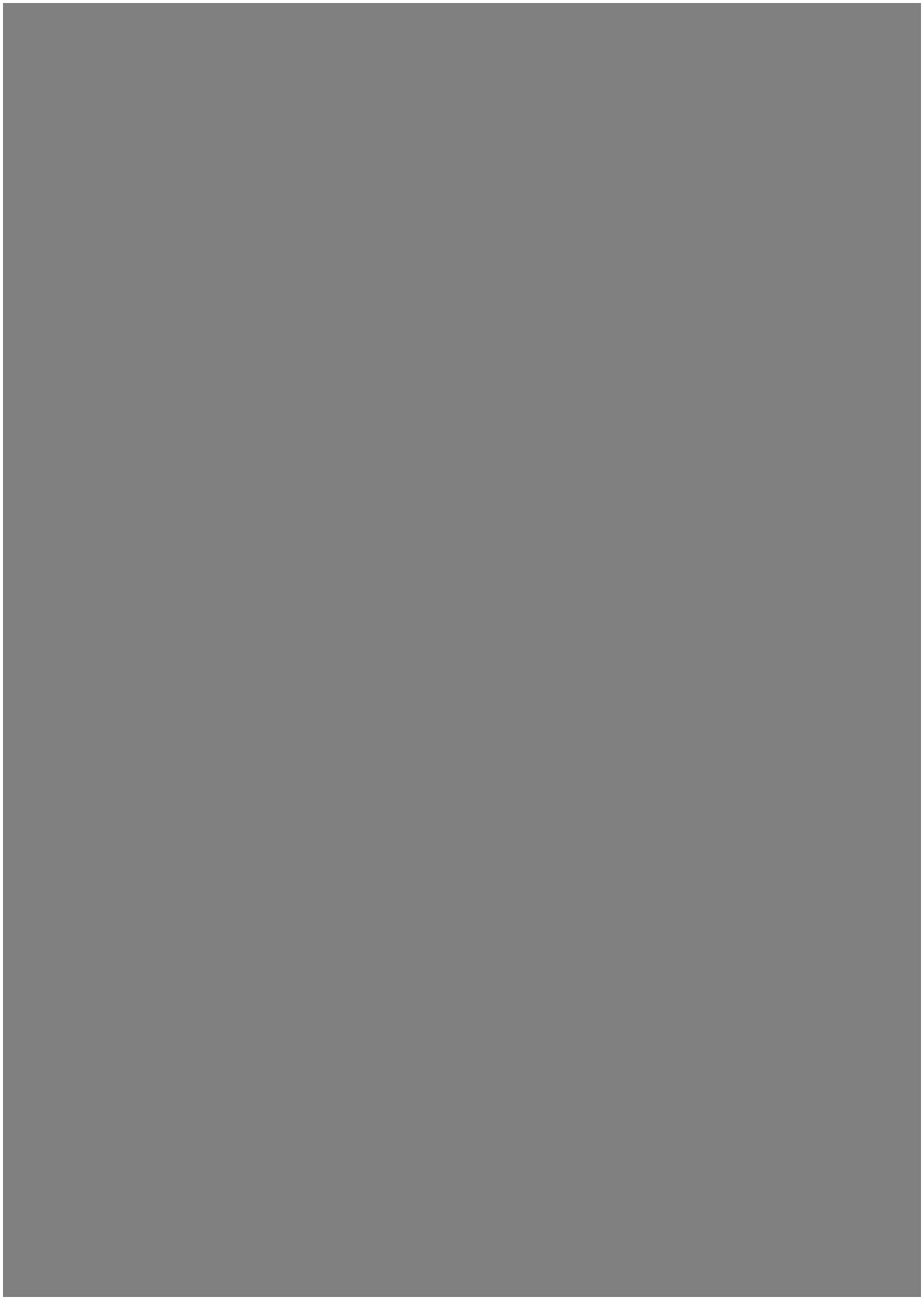

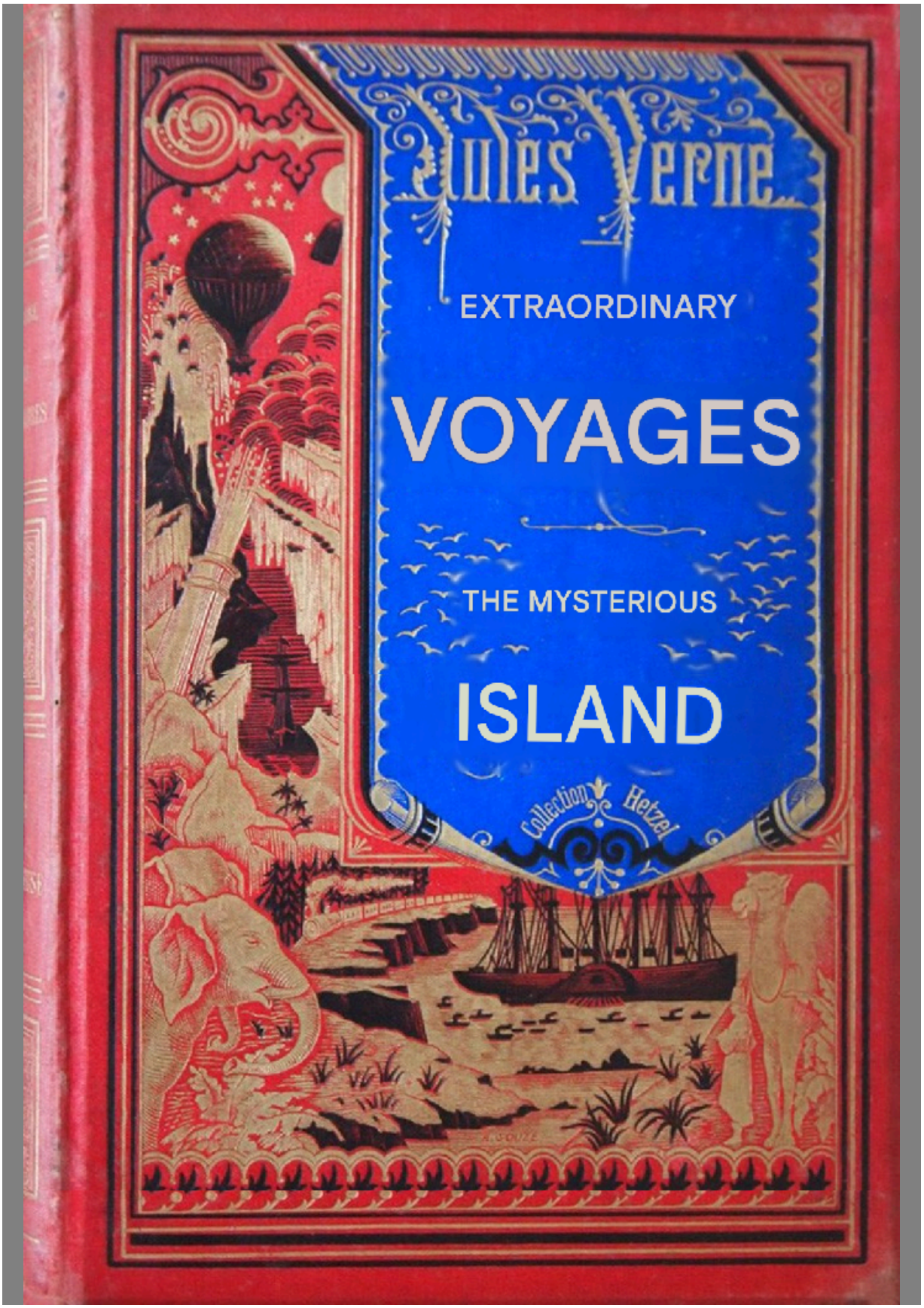
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Title : The Mysterious Island

Author : Jules Verne

Release date : December 7, 2004 [eBook #14287]

Most recently updated: October 28, 2024

Language : French

Other information and formats : www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14287

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND ***

Jules Verne

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

(1875)

Table of Contents

PART 1,

CHAPTER I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII

PART 2

CHAPTER I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX

PART 3

CHAPTER I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VIII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX

PART 1

THE AIR SHIPWRECKED

CHAPTER I

"Shall we go back up?"

— No! On the contrary! We're getting off!

"Worse than that, Mr. Cyrus! We're falling!"

— For God's sake! Throw off the ballast!

— There's the last bag emptied!

— Is the ball rising?

- No!

— I hear something like the lapping of waves!

— The sea is under the gondola!

"She can't be more than five hundred feet away from us!"

Then a powerful voice tore through the air, and these words resounded:

"Out with everything that weighs you down!... everything! And in the grace of God!"

These were the words that burst into the air, above this vast desert of water in the Pacific, around four o'clock in the evening, on the day of March 23, 1865.

No one has surely forgotten the terrible northeasterly gale that raged in the middle of this year's equinox, during which the barometer plummeted to 710 millimeters. It was a hurricane, without interruption, that lasted from March 18th to 26th. The devastation it caused was immense in America, Europe, and Asia, over a zone 1,800 miles wide, stretching obliquely from the 35th parallel north to the 40th parallel south, across the equator!

Overturned cities, uprooted forests, shores devastated by mountains of water rushing in like tidal bores, ships driven ashore—a number that Bureau Veritas counted in the hundreds—entire territories leveled by waterspouts that crushed everything in their path, several thousand people crushed on land or swallowed by the sea: such were the testimonies of its fury, left behind by this formidable hurricane. Its devastation surpassed that of the storms that so horribly ravaged Havana and Guadeloupe, the former on October 25, 1810, the latter on July 26, 1825.

But at the very moment when so many catastrophes were unfolding on land and sea, a no less striking drama was playing out in the turbulent skies. A balloon, carried like a ball atop a waterspout and caught in the swirling motion of the air column, was traversing the sky at a speed of ninety miles per hour, spinning on its axis as if seized by some aerial maelstrom. Below the balloon's lower appendage swayed a gondola containing five passengers, barely visible amidst the thick vapors, mixed with spray, that trailed to the surface of the ocean.

Where did this balloon come from, a veritable plaything of the terrible storm? From what point in the world had it launched? It obviously couldn't have departed during the hurricane. Yet the hurricane had already been raging for five days, and its first symptoms had appeared on the 18th. One would therefore have been justified in believing that this balloon came from very far away, for it must have covered at least two thousand miles in twenty-four hours. In any case, the passengers could not have had any means of estimating the distance traveled since their departure, for they lacked any point of reference. There must even have been this curious phenomenon: carried along in the midst of the storm's violence, they did not feel its effects. They moved, they spun around without feeling anything of this rotation, nor of their horizontal movement. Their eyes could not pierce

the thick fog that was gathering beneath the gondola. Around them, everything was mist. Such was the opacity of the clouds that they couldn't tell whether it was day or night. No glimmer of light, no sound from inhabited lands, no roar of the ocean could have reached them in that dark immensity while they remained in the highlands. Only their rapid descent could have made them aware of the dangers they faced above the waves.

However, the balloon, relieved of heavy objects such as ammunition, weapons, and provisions, had risen into the upper layers of the atmosphere, at a height of 4,500 feet. The passengers, having realized that the sea lay beneath the gondola, and finding the dangers less daunting above than below, had not hesitated to throw even the most useful items overboard, and they sought to lose nothing more of that vital force, that very soul of their craft, which sustained them above the abyss.

The night passed amidst anxieties that would have been fatal to less energetic souls. Then day broke, and with it, the hurricane showed signs of moderation. From the very beginning of March 24th, there were some signs of calming. At dawn, the clouds, now more vesicular, had risen higher into the sky. Within a few hours, the waterspout broadened and dissipated. The wind, from hurricane force, became a

"fresh breeze," meaning that the speed of movement of the atmospheric layers decreased by half. It was still what sailors call "a three-reefed breeze," but the improvement in the turbulent weather was nonetheless considerable.

Around eleven o'clock, the lower part of the air had noticeably cleared. The atmosphere gave off that humid clarity that one sees, even feels, after the passage of great storms. It did not appear that the hurricane had gone any further west. It seemed to have dissipated. Perhaps it had flowed away in sheets of electricity after the waterspout broke up, as sometimes happens with typhoons in the Indian Ocean.

But, around that time, it would have been possible to observe once again that the balloon was slowly descending, in a continuous movement, into the lower layers of the air. It even seemed that it was gradually deflating, and that its envelope was lengthening as it stretched, changing from a spherical to an ovoid shape.

Around noon, the balloon was hovering at a height of only two thousand feet above sea level. Its volume was fifty thousand cubic feet, and, thanks to this capacity, it had obviously been able to remain airborne for a long time, whether by reaching great altitudes or by moving in a horizontal direction. At this moment, the passengers jettisoned the last remaining weights—the gondola, the few provisions

they had kept, everything, down to the small utensils in their pockets—and one of them, having hoisted himself onto the circle where the net's ropes met, tried to securely tie the lower appendage of the balloon.

It was obvious that the passengers could no longer keep the balloon in the high areas, and that they were running out of gas!

They were lost! Indeed, it was neither a continent nor even an island that stretched beneath them. Space offered not a single point of landing, not a solid surface on which their anchor could bite.

It was the immense sea, its waves still crashing with incomparable violence! It was the Ocean, without visible limits, even to them, who towered above it and whose gaze then extended forty miles! It was this liquid plain, relentlessly battered, lashed by the hurricane, which must have appeared to them like a ride of wild waves, upon which a vast network of white crests had been cast! Not a land in sight, not a ship!

It was therefore imperative to stop the downward movement at all costs, to prevent the balloon from being swallowed up by the waves. And it was obviously this urgent task that the passengers in the gondola were working towards. But, despite their efforts, the balloon continued to descend, while simultaneously moving at an extreme speed, following the direction of the wind, that is to say, from northeast to southwest.

What a terrible situation these unfortunate people were in! They were clearly no longer in control of the balloon. Their attempts were doomed. The balloon's envelope was deflating more and more. The fluid was escaping without any possibility of stopping it. The descent was visibly accelerating, and by one o'clock in the afternoon, the gondola was no more than six hundred feet above the ocean.

Indeed, it was impossible to prevent the gas leak, which escaped freely through a tear in the device. By lightening the gondola of all the objects it contained, the passengers were able to prolong their suspension in the air for a few hours.

But the inevitable catastrophe could only be delayed, and, if some land did not appear before nightfall, passengers, gondola and balloon would have definitively disappeared into the waves.

The only remaining maneuver was carried out at that moment. The passengers of the airship were clearly energetic people, who knew how to face death. Not a single murmur could have escaped their lips.

They were determined to fight to the very last second, to do everything possible to delay their fall. The gondola was nothing more than a kind of wicker box, unsuitable for floating, and there was no way to keep it afloat if it fell into the sea.

At two o'clock, the balloon was barely four hundred feet above the waves. At that moment, a man's voice—the voice of a man whose heart was impervious to fear—was heard. To this voice answered voices no less forceful.

"Is everything thrown away?"

"No! There are still ten thousand gold francs!"

A heavy bag immediately fell into the sea.

"Is the ball rising again?"

— A little, but it won't be long before it falls back down!

— What is left to throw out?

- Nothing!

— Yes!... The gondola!

"Let's hold on to the net! And the boat to the sea!"

This was, in fact, the only and last way to lighten the balloon. The ropes that attached the gondola to the ring were cut, and the balloon, after its fall, rose two thousand feet.

The five passengers had hoisted themselves into the net, above the circle, and stood in the mesh, gazing into the abyss.

We know the remarkable static sensitivity of aerostats. Simply dropping even the lightest object is enough to cause a vertical

displacement. The device, floating in the air, behaves like a balance of mathematical precision. It is therefore understandable that, when relieved of a relatively considerable weight, its displacement is significant and abrupt. This is precisely what happened on this occasion.

But, after briefly stabilizing in the upper zones, the aerostat began to descend again.

Gas was leaking through the tear, which was impossible to repair.

The passengers had done everything they could. No human means could save them now. They had no one left but God's help.

At four o'clock, the balloon was only five hundred feet from the surface of the water. A loud bark was heard. A dog had accompanied the passengers and was clinging to its master in the net.

"Top saw something!" exclaimed one of the passengers.

Then, immediately, a loud voice was heard:

"Land! Land!"

The balloon, which the wind kept driving towards the southwest, had, since dawn, covered a considerable distance, amounting to hundreds of miles, and a fairly high piece of land had indeed just appeared in that direction.

But that land was still thirty miles downwind. It would take at least an hour to reach it, and that was assuming one didn't drift. An hour! Wouldn't the balloon have emptied itself of all its remaining fluid by then?

That was the terrible question! The passengers could clearly see that solid point, which they had to reach at all costs. They didn't know what it was, island or continent, for they barely knew to what part of the world the hurricane had swept them! But that land, whether inhabited or not, whether hospitable or not, they had to get there!

However, at four o'clock, it was clear that the balloon could no longer support itself.

CHAPTER II

It skimmed the surface of the sea. The crests of the enormous waves had already repeatedly lapped the bottom of the net, weighing it down even more, and the balloon was now only half-lifted, like a bird with lead in its wing. Half an hour later, land was only a mile away, but the balloon, exhausted, limp, stretched out, crumpled in large folds, retained only gas in its upper part. The passengers, clinging to the net, were still too heavy for it, and soon, half-submerged in the sea, they were battered by the furious waves. The balloon's envelope then

formed a pocket, and the wind, rushing in, pushed it like a ship running downwind.

Perhaps that's how he would reach the shore!

He was only two cable lengths away when terrible cries, emanating from four chests at once, rang out. The balloon, which seemed destined never to rise again, had just made another unexpected leap after being struck by a tremendous wave. As if suddenly relieved of another part of its weight, it climbed to a height of fifteen hundred feet, where it encountered a kind of eddy in the wind, which, instead of carrying it directly to the shore, made it follow an almost parallel course. Finally, two minutes later, it approached the coast at an angle and fell back down for good onto the sandy shore, beyond the reach of the waves.

The passengers, helping each other, managed to free themselves from the net. The balloon, relieved of their weight, was caught by the wind, and like a wounded bird regaining a moment of life, it disappeared into space.

The gondola had held five passengers, plus a dog, and the balloon only dropped four onto the shore.

The missing passenger had obviously been swept away by the wave that had just hit the net, and that was what had allowed the lighter

balloon to rise one last time, and then, a few moments later, to reach land.

No sooner had the four shipwrecked men—we can call them that—set foot on the ground than all of them, thinking of the absent one, cried out: "He may be trying to swim ashore! Let's save him! Let's save him!"

They were neither professional aeronauts nor amateur aerial explorers whom the hurricane had just washed ashore. They were prisoners of war, whose audacity had driven them to escape under extraordinary circumstances.

A hundred times they should have perished! A hundred times their torn balloon should have plunged them into the abyss! But fate had a strange destiny in store for them, and on March 20th, after fleeing Richmond, besieged by the troops of General Ulysses Grant, they found themselves seven thousand miles from that Virginia capital, the main stronghold of the separatists during the terrible Civil War. Their air voyage had lasted five days.

Here, moreover, are the curious circumstances in which the escape of the prisoners took place — an escape which was to lead to the catastrophe we know.

That same year, in February 1865, during one of General Grant's unsuccessful attempts to seize Richmond, several of his officers fell into

enemy hands and were interned in the city. One of the most distinguished among those captured belonged to the Federal staff and was named Cyrus Smith.

Cyrus Smith, a native of Massachusetts, was an engineer, a first-rate scientist, to whom the Union government had entrusted, during the war, the direction of the railroads, whose strategic role was so considerable. A true North American, thin, bony, and gaunt, about forty-five years old, he was already graying from his shaved head and beard, of which he retained only a thick mustache. He had one of those handsome, "numismatic" faces that seem made for being struck on medals, with ardent eyes, a serious mouth, and the countenance of a scientist of the militant school. He was one of those engineers who wanted to begin by wielding the hammer and pickaxe, like those generals who wanted to start as simple soldiers. Thus, along with intellectual ingenuity, he possessed supreme manual dexterity. His muscles displayed remarkable signs of tone. Truly a man of action as well as a man of thought, he acted effortlessly, under the influence of a broad vital expansion, having that vivid persistence which defies all bad luck.

Highly educated, very practical, very resourceful—to use a term from French military jargon—he possessed a superb temperament, for, while

remaining in control of himself under all circumstances, he fulfilled to the highest degree those three conditions which together define human energy: activity of mind and body, impetuosity of desires, and strength of will. His motto could have been that of William of Orange in the 17th century: "I need not hope to undertake, nor succeed to persevere." At the same time, Cyrus Smith was courage personified. He had fought in every battle during the American Civil War. Having begun his service under Ulysses Grant in the Illinois Volunteers, he had fought at Paducah, Belmont, Pittsburgh Landing, the Siege of Corinth, Port Gibson, the Black River, Chattanoga, Wilderness, on the Potomak—everywhere and valiantly, a soldier worthy of the general who replied, “I never count my dead!” And a hundred times over, Cyrus Smith should have been among those not counted by the fearsome Grant, but in these battles, where he spared himself little, luck always favored him, until the moment he was wounded and captured on the battlefield of Richmond. At the same time as Cyrus Smith, and on the same day, another important figure fell into the hands of the Confederates. It was none other than the Honorable Gideon Spilett, a reporter for the New York Herald, who had been assigned to follow the vicissitudes of the war amidst the Union armies.

Gideon Spilett belonged to the breed of those remarkable English or American journalists, the Stanleys and others, who stopped at nothing to obtain accurate information and transmit it to their newspapers as quickly as possible. Union newspapers, such as the New York Herald, were veritable powers, and their correspondents were representatives to be reckoned with. Gideon Spilett ranked among the foremost of these correspondents.

A man of great merit, energetic, quick and ready for anything, full of ideas, having traveled the whole world, soldier and artist, fiery in council, resolute in action, counting neither pains, nor fatigues, nor dangers, when it came to knowing everything, for himself first, and for his newspaper afterwards, a true hero of curiosity, of information, of the unpublished, of the unknown, of the impossible, he was one of those intrepid observers who write under bullets, chronicle under cannonballs, and for whom all perils are good fortunes.

He too had been in all the battles, in the front rank, revolver in one hand, notebook in the other, and the machine gun fire did not make his pencil tremble.

He didn't tire out the incessant telegrams, like those who talk when they have nothing to say, but each of his notes, short, concise, and clear, shed light on an important point. Moreover, he had a good sense of

humor. It was he who, after the Black River affair, determined to keep his position at the telegraph office window so he could announce the outcome of the battle to his newspaper, telegraphed the first chapters of the Bible for two hours. It cost the New York Herald two thousand dollars, but the New York Herald was the first to know.

Gideon Spilett was tall. He was no more than forty years old. Reddish-blond sideburns framed his face. His eyes were calm, sharp, and quick-moving. They were the eyes of a man accustomed to rapidly perceiving every detail of a horizon. Solidly built, he had weathered every climate like a steel bar in cold water. For ten years, Gideon Spilett had been the regular reporter for the New York Herald, which he enriched with his columns and drawings, for he wielded both pencil and pen with equal skill.

When he was captured, he was in the process of describing and sketching the battle. The last words recorded in his notebook were these: "A Southerner takes aim at me and..." And Gideon Spilett was wrongly arrested, for, true to form, he escaped from this affair without a scratch.

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett, who did not know each other except by reputation, had both been transported to Richmond.

The engineer recovered quickly from his injury, and it was during his convalescence that he met the reporter. The two men took a liking to each other and grew to appreciate one another. Soon, their life together had only one purpose: to escape, join Grant's army, and fight once more in its ranks for federal unity.

The two Americans were therefore determined to seize every opportunity; but although they had been allowed to roam freely in the city, Richmond was so heavily guarded that escape was considered impossible. Meanwhile, Cyrus Smith was joined by a servant who was devoted to him unto death.

This intrepid man was a Black man, born on the engineer's estate to a father and mother who were slaves, but whom Cyrus Smith, an abolitionist by both mind and heart, had long ago freed. The slave, now free, had not wanted to leave his master.

He loved her to death. He was a thirty-year-old boy, vigorous, agile, skillful, intelligent, gentle and calm, sometimes naive, always smiling, helpful and kind. His name was Nebuchadnezzar, but he only answered to the familiar, abbreviated name of Nab.

When Nab learned that his master had been taken prisoner, he left Massachusetts without hesitation, arrived before Richmond, and, through cunning and skill, after risking his life twenty times, managed

to enter the besieged city. The pleasure of Cyrus Smith at seeing his servant again, and the joy of Nab at finding his master, cannot be described.

But while Nab had been able to enter Richmond, it was much more difficult to get out, because federal prisoners were under very close surveillance.

An extraordinary opportunity was needed to attempt an escape with any chance of success, and not only did this opportunity not present itself, but it was difficult to create it.

However, Grant continued his energetic operations. The victory at Petersburg had been hard-won. His forces, combined with Butler's, were still achieving no results before Richmond, and there was no indication that the prisoners' release would be imminent. The reporter, whose tedious captivity no longer provided him with any interesting details to record, could bear it no longer. He had only one thought: to get out of Richmond, at any cost. Several times, in fact, he attempted the venture and was stopped by insurmountable obstacles.

However, the siege continued, and while the prisoners were eager to escape and join Grant's army, some of the besieged were no less eager to flee and join the Confederate army, among them a certain Jonathan Forster, a fervent Southerner. Indeed, if the Federal prisoners could not

leave the city, neither could the Confederates, for the Union army was surrounding them. The governor of Richmond had long been unable to communicate with General Lee, and it was of the utmost importance to make the city's situation known in order to hasten the arrival of the relief army. Jonathan Forster then conceived the idea of taking off in a balloon, crossing the besieging lines, and thus reaching the Confederate camp.

The governor authorized the attempt. A balloon was built and placed at Jonathan Forster's disposal, and five of his companions were to follow him in the air. They were equipped with weapons, in case they needed to defend themselves upon landing, and with provisions, in case their aerial journey was prolonged.

The balloon's departure had been set for March 18th. It was to take place during the night, and, with a moderate north-westerly wind, the aeronauts expected to arrive at Lee's headquarters in a few hours.

But this northwest wind was no mere breeze. By the 18th, it was clear that it was turning into a hurricane. Soon, the storm became so fierce that Forster's departure had to be postponed, as it was impossible to risk the balloon and those on board amidst the raging elements.

The balloon, inflated in Richmond's main square, was therefore there, ready to depart at the first lull in the wind, and, in the town, there was

great impatience to see that the state of the atmosphere was not changing.

March 18th and 19th passed without any change in the turmoil. There were even great difficulties in preserving the balloon, which was tethered to the ground, as the gusts of wind were knocking it to the ground.

The night of the 19th to the 20th passed, but in the morning, the hurricane was developing with even greater force. Departure was impossible.

That day, the engineer Cyrus Smith was approached on one of Richmond's streets by a man he didn't know. It was a sailor named Pencroff, between thirty-five and forty years old, powerfully built, very tanned, with bright, blinking eyes, but a kind face. This Pencroff was a North American who had sailed all the seas of the globe, and to whom, in terms of adventures, everything extraordinary that can happen to a two-legged, featherless creature had befallen. Needless to say, he was an enterprising man, ready to dare anything, and who could be surprised by nothing. At the beginning of that year, Pencroff had come to Richmond on business with a fifteen-year-old boy, Harbert Brown, from the New Jersey, the son of his captain, an orphan whom he loved as if he were his own child. Having been unable to leave the city before

the initial siege operations, he found himself trapped there, much to his displeasure, and he too had only one thought: to escape by any means possible. He knew of the engineer Cyrus Smith by reputation. He knew how impatiently this determined man chafed at the bit. That day, he didn't hesitate to approach him, saying without further ado:

"Mr. Smith, have you had enough of Richmond?"

The engineer stared fixedly at the man who was speaking to him, and who added in a low voice:

"Mr. Smith, do you want to flee?"

"When?" replied the engineer quickly, and it can be said that this answer escaped him, for he had not yet examined the stranger who was speaking to him.

But after having observed the loyal face of the sailor with a penetrating eye, he could not doubt that he had before him an honest man.

"Who are you?" he asked in a curt voice.

Pencroff made a name for himself.

"Very well," replied Cyrus Smith. "And by what means do you propose I escape?"

"By that lazy ball we leave there doing nothing, and which gives me the impression of having been waiting for us on purpose!..."

The sailor had not needed to finish his sentence.

The engineer understood with a single word. He grabbed Pencroff by the arm and dragged him home.

There, the sailor developed his plan, which was very simple in truth. The only risk one could take in carrying it out was one's life.

The hurricane was in all its violence, it is true, but a skillful and daring engineer, such as Cyrus Smith, would know how to pilot an airship.

If Pencroff had known about the maneuver, he wouldn't have hesitated to leave—with Harbert, of course. He'd seen plenty of worse, and was no longer worried about a storm!

Cyrus Smith had listened to the sailor without a word, but his eyes shone. The opportunity was there. He wasn't the kind of man to let it slip away. The plan was only very dangerous, therefore it was feasible.

At night, despite the surveillance, it was possible to approach the balloon, slip into the gondola, and then cut the tethers that held it! Certainly, one risked being killed, but on the other hand, one could succeed, and if it weren't for this storm... But without this storm, the

balloon would already have departed, and the long-sought opportunity would not be presenting itself now!

"I am not alone!... said Cyrus Smith in conclusion.

"So how many people do you want to take?" asked the sailor.

— Two: my friend Spilett and my servant Nab.

"That makes three then," replied Pencroff, "and, with Harbert and me, five. But the balloon was supposed to lift six..."

"That's enough. We're leaving!" said Cyrus Smith.

This "we" committed the reporter, but the reporter was not one to back down, and when the project was presented to him, he approved it without reservation. What surprised him was that such a simple idea hadn't already occurred to him. As for Nab, he followed his master wherever his master wanted to go.

"See you tonight then," said Pencroff. "The five of us will stroll around there, curious!"

"See you tonight at ten o'clock," replied Cyrus Smith, "and may heaven grant that this storm does not subside before our departure!"

Pencroff took leave of the engineer and returned to his lodgings, where young Harbert Brown remained. This courageous boy knew the sailor's plan, and it was with some anxiety that he awaited the outcome

of the approach made to the engineer. As you can see, these were five determined men who were about to plunge into the storm, right into the heart of the hurricane!

No! The hurricane did not subside, and neither Jonathan Forster nor his companions could even consider braving it in that fragile gondola! The day was terrible. The engineer feared only one thing: that the balloon, held to the ground and lying down in the wind, would tear to pieces. For several hours, he prowled the almost deserted square, watching the craft. Pencroff did the same, his hands in his pockets, yawning when necessary, like a man who doesn't know how to kill time, but also fearing that the balloon might tear or even break its tethers and escape into the air.

Evening arrived. The night grew very dark. Thick mists drifted by like clouds skimming the ground. Rain mixed with snow fell. The weather was cold. A kind of fog hung over Richmond. It seemed as if the violent storm had brought about a truce between the besiegers and the besieged, and that the cannon had fallen silent before the tremendous detonations of the hurricane. The city streets were deserted. It hadn't even seemed necessary, in this dreadful weather, to guard the square in the middle of which the balloon struggled.

Everything favored the prisoners' departure, obviously; but this journey, amidst the raging gusts of wind!...

"What a nasty tide!" Pencroff said to himself, glaring at his hat, which the wind was vying for. "But oh well! We'll get through it somehow!"

At half past nine, Cyrus Smith and his companions slipped into the square from various directions, which the gas lanterns, extinguished by the wind, left in deep darkness. The enormous balloon, almost entirely brought down to the ground, was not even visible.

Apart from the ballast bags that held the net ropes, the gondola was held by a strong cable passed through a ring sealed in the paving, and whose double led back on board.

The five prisoners met near the gondola. They had not been seen, and such was the darkness that they could not see themselves.

Without a word, Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Nab, and Harbert took their places in the gondola, while Pencroff, on the engineer's orders, detached the ballast packages one after the other. It was a matter of moments, and the sailor rejoined his companions.

The balloon was then held only by two cables, and Cyrus Smith simply had to give the order to launch. At that moment, a dog leaped up the gondola.

It was Top, the engineer's dog, who, having broken his chain, had followed his master. Cyrus Smith, fearing he would gain weight, wanted to send the poor animal away.

"Well! one more!" said Pencroff, unloading two bags of sand from the basket.

Then he dropped twice the cable, and the balloon, departing in an oblique direction, disappeared, after hitting its gondola against two chimneys which it brought down in the fury of its departure.

The hurricane then raged with terrifying violence. During the night, the engineer couldn't even think of descending, and when day broke, all sight of land was obscured by the mists. It was only five days later that a break in the clouds revealed the immense sea below the balloon, which the wind was driving with frightening speed!

We know how, of these five men, who left on March 20, four were cast ashore on March 24 on a deserted coast, more than six thousand miles from their country!

And the one who was missing, the one to whose aid the four balloon survivors first ran, was their natural leader, it was the engineer Cyrus Smith!

CHAPTER III

The engineer, having slipped through the gaps in the net, was swept away by a wave.

His dog had also disappeared. The faithful animal had deliberately rushed to its master's aid.

"Forward!" cried the reporter.

And all four of them, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Pencroff and Nab, forgetting exhaustion and fatigue, began their search.

Poor Nab wept with rage and despair at the thought of having lost everything he loved in the world.

Less than two minutes had passed between the moment Cyrus Smith disappeared and the moment his companions reached land. They could therefore hope to arrive in time to save him.

"Let's search! Let's search!" cried Nab.

"Yes, Nab," replied Gideon Spilett, "and we will find him!"

- Alive?

- Alive!

"Can he swim?" asked Pencroff.

"Yes!" replied Nab. "And besides, Top is here!"

The sailor, hearing the sea roar, shook his head!

It was in the north of the coast, and about half a mile from where the shipwrecked men had just landed, that the engineer had disappeared. If he had been able to reach the nearest point of the shore, then that point must have been at most half a mile away.

It was nearly six o'clock then. The mist had just lifted, making the night very dark. The shipwrecked men walked northward along the east coast of this land on which chance had cast them—an unknown land, whose geographical location they could not even suspect. They trod on sandy soil, mixed with stones, which seemed devoid of any kind of vegetation.

The ground, very uneven and rough, seemed in places riddled with small hollows, making walking extremely difficult. From these holes, large birds with heavy flight constantly emerged, fleeing in all directions, obscured by the darkness. Others, more agile, rose in flocks and passed like clouds.

The sailor thought he recognized gulls and seagulls, whose high-pitched whistles clashed with the roar of the sea. From time to time, the shipwrecked men stopped, called out loudly, and listened to see if any call could be heard from the direction of the ocean.

They must have thought, in fact, that if they had been near the spot where the engineer might have landed, the barking of the dog Top, in

case Cyrus Smith was unable to give any sign of life, would have reached them. But no cry stood out above the roar of the waves and the clatter of the surf. So, the small group resumed its advance, searching every nook and cranny of the shoreline.

After a twenty-minute chase, the four shipwrecked men were suddenly stopped by a foaming edge of waves. Solid ground was gone. They found themselves at the tip of a sharp point, against which the sea was breaking furiously.

"It's a promontory," said the sailor. "We must retrace our steps, keeping to our right, and we will thus reach the open ground."

"But it is there!" replied Nab, pointing to the Ocean, whose enormous waves were whitening in the shadows.

"Well, let's call him!"

And all, joining their voices, launched a vigorous appeal, but nothing answered. They waited for a lull. They tried again. Still nothing.

The shipwrecked sailors then returned, following the opposite side of the promontory, onto ground that was also sandy and rocky. However, Pencroff observed that the shoreline was steeper, that the land rose, and he surmised that it must lead, by a rather long ramp, to a high coast whose massif was indistinctly outlined in the shadows. There were fewer birds on this part of the shore. The sea, too, was less choppy, less

noisy, and it was even remarkable that the agitation of the waves diminished considerably. The sound of the surf was barely audible. Undoubtedly, this side of the promontory formed a semi-circular cove, its sharp point protecting it from the undulations of the open sea.

But following this direction would lead south, and that would be in the opposite direction from the stretch of coast where Cyrus Smith had managed to gain a foothold. After a mile and a half, the coastline still presented no curve that would allow them to turn back north. Yet this promontory, whose point they had rounded, must somehow connect to the mainland.

The shipwrecked men, though their strength was exhausted, still marched on with courage, hoping to find at every moment some sharp turn that would put them back on their original course. How disappointed they were, then, when, after traveling about two miles, they found themselves once again stopped by the sea on a rather high point made of slippery rocks.

"We are on an islet!" said Pencroff, "and we have surveyed it from one end to the other!"

The sailor's observation was correct. The shipwrecked men had been thrown, not onto a continent, not even onto an island, but onto an islet

which measured no more than two miles in length, and whose width was obviously not very considerable.

Was this barren, rocky islet, devoid of vegetation, a desolate refuge for a few seabirds, part of a larger archipelago? It was impossible to say for sure. The balloon's passengers, when they glimpsed land through the mists from their gondola, hadn't been able to fully grasp its significance. However, Pencroff, with his sailor's eyes accustomed to penetrating the shadows, believed he could make out, at that moment, indistinct shapes to the west, hinting at a high coastline.

But, in this darkness, it was impossible to determine to which system, simple or complex, the islet belonged. Nor was it possible to leave it, since the sea surrounded it. The engineer's search, which, alas, had not signaled its presence with any cry, had therefore had to be postponed until the following day.

"Cyrus's silence proves nothing," the reporter said. "He may have fainted, been injured, or been temporarily unable to respond, but let's not despair."

The reporter then suggested lighting a fire somewhere on the islet that could serve as a signal for the engineer. But they searched in vain for wood or dry brush. Sand and stones—there was nothing else.

One can only imagine the pain felt by Nab and his companions, who had grown so attached to the intrepid Cyrus Smith. It was all too clear that they were powerless to rescue him. They had to wait for daylight. Either the engineer had managed to save himself, and had already found refuge somewhere along the coast, or he was lost forever!

Those were long and agonizing hours. The cold was biting. The shipwrecked survivors suffered terribly, but they barely noticed. They didn't even think of taking a moment's rest.

Forgetting themselves for their leader, hoping, wanting to hope always, they went to and fro on that barren islet, returning incessantly to its northern tip, where they must be closer to the site of the disaster. They listened, they shouted, they sought to overhear some final call, and their voices must have carried far, for a certain calm reigned in the air, and the sounds of the sea began to subside with the swell. One of Nab's cries even seemed, at a certain moment, to echo back. Harbert pointed this out to Pencroff, adding:

"This would prove that there is a fairly close coastline in the west."

The sailor gave an affirmative sign. Besides, his eyes could not deceive him. If he had, however slightly, discerned land, then land was there.

But this distant echo was the only response provoked by Nab's cries, and the vastness, over the entire eastern part of the islet, remained

silent.

However, the sky was gradually clearing. Around midnight, a few stars shone, and if the engineer had been there with his companions, he would have noticed that these stars were no longer those of the northern hemisphere. Indeed, Polaris was not visible on this new horizon, the zenithal constellations were no longer those he was accustomed to observing in the northern part of the new continent, and the Southern Cross was now shining brightly at the southern pole of the world.

The night passed. Around five o'clock in the morning of March 25th, the upper reaches of the sky began to darken slightly. The horizon remained dark, but with the first light of day, an opaque mist rose from the sea, so that visibility was limited to about twenty paces. The fog unfurled in large, heavy, swirling wisps.

It was a setback. The shipwrecked men couldn't make out anything around them. While Nab and the reporter's eyes were fixed on the ocean, the sailor and Harbert searched for the coast to the west. But not a single piece of land was visible.

"It doesn't matter," said Pencroff, "if I can't see the coast, I can feel it... it's there... there... as sure as we're no longer in Richmond!"

But the fog was soon to lift.

It was merely a fair-weather mist. A bright sun warmed its upper layers, and this heat filtered down to the surface of the islet. Indeed, around 6:30, three-quarters of an hour after sunrise, the mist became more transparent. It thickened at the top but dissipated below. Soon the entire islet appeared, as if it had descended from a cloud; then, the sea revealed itself in a circular pattern, boundless to the east, but limited to the west by a high and steep coastline.

Yes! Land was there. There, salvation was assured, at least temporarily. Between the islet and the coast, separated by a channel half a mile wide, an extremely rapid current propagated with a noise.

However, one of the shipwrecked men, following his heart alone, immediately plunged into the current, without consulting his companions, without even saying a word. It was Nab. He was eager to reach that shore and sail north. No one could have stopped him. Pencroff called him back, but in vain.

The reporter was preparing to follow Nab.

Pencroff, then going to him:

"Do you want to cross this canal?" he asked.

— Yes, replied Gideon Spilett.

“Well, wait, believe me,” said the sailor. “Nab will be enough to come to his master’s aid. If we were to enter that channel, we would risk being swept out to sea by the current, which is extremely strong. Now, if I’m not mistaken, it’s an ebb tide. Look, the tide is going out on the sand. So let’s be patient, and at low tide, it’s possible we’ll find a fordable passage…”

"You're right," replied the reporter. "Let's separate as little as possible..."

Meanwhile, Nab struggled vigorously against the current. He crossed it at an oblique angle. His dark shoulders could be seen emerging with each stroke. He drifted with tremendous speed, but he was also gaining ground on the coast. It took him more than half an hour to cross the half mile separating the islet from the mainland, and he only reached the shore several thousand feet from the point directly opposite his starting point.

Nab gained a foothold at the base of a high granite wall and shook himself vigorously; then, running full speed, he soon disappeared behind a point of rock, which projected into the sea, roughly at the height of the northern end of the islet.

Nab's companions had anxiously followed his daring attempt, and when he was out of sight, they turned their gaze back to the land to

which they were going to seek refuge, while eating some of the shells scattered across the sand. It was a meager meal, but it was something nonetheless.

The opposite coast formed a vast bay, ending to the south in a very sharp point, devoid of vegetation and quite wild in appearance. This point joined the shoreline in a rather capricious fashion and abutted against high granite rocks. To the north, on the contrary, the bay widened, forming a more rounded coastline that ran from southwest to northeast and ended in a tapered cape. Between these two extreme points, on which the arc of the bay rested, the distance could be eight miles. Half a mile from the shore, the islet occupied a narrow strip of sea and resembled an enormous cetacean, of which it represented a greatly enlarged carcass. Its maximum width did not exceed a quarter of a mile. In front of the islet, the coastline consisted, in the foreground, of a sandy beach strewn with dark rocks, which were now gradually reappearing beneath the receding tide. In the middle ground stood a kind of granite curtain wall, sheer and crowned by a capricious ridge at least three hundred feet high. It stretched for three miles and ended abruptly on the right with a cut-off section that looked as if it had been hewn by human hands. On the left, however, above the promontory, this sort of irregular cliff, crumbling into prismatic fragments and made of

agglomerated rocks and scree, sloped down in an elongated ramp that gradually merged with the rocks of the southern point. On the upper plateau of the coast, there were no trees.

It was a clear plateau, like the one overlooking Cape Town at the Cape of Good Hope, but on a smaller scale. At least, it appeared so from the islet. However, there was no shortage of greenery to the right, behind the chamfered edge. One could easily distinguish the indistinct mass of tall trees, whose cluster extended beyond the eye's reach. This greenery delighted the eye, sorely saddened by the harsh lines of the granite face. Finally, far in the background and above the plateau, in a northwesterly direction and at a distance of at least seven miles, a white peak shone brightly, struck by the sun's rays. It was a cap of snow, crowning some distant mountain.

It was therefore impossible to determine whether this land formed an island or belonged to a continent. But, seeing these contorted rocks piled up on the left, a geologist would not have hesitated to attribute them to a volcanic origin, for they were undeniably the product of plutonic activity.

Gideon Spilett, Pencroff and Harbert carefully observed this land, on which they might live for many years, on which they might even die, if it was not on the route of the ships!

"Well! asked Herbert, what do you say, Pencroff?

“Well,” replied the sailor, “there are good and bad aspects, as with everything. We’ll see. But the ebb tide is starting to make itself felt. In three hours, we’ll attempt the passage, and once there, we’ll try to extricate ourselves and find Mr. Smith!”

Pencroff had not been wrong in his predictions.

Three hours later, at low tide, most of the sand forming the channel bed had been exposed. Between the islet and the shore remained only a narrow channel, which would undoubtedly be easy to cross. Indeed, around ten o'clock, Gideon Spilett and his two companions stripped off their clothes, bundled them on their heads, and ventured into the channel, which was no more than five feet deep. Harbert, for whom the water would have been too deep, swam like a fish and fared remarkably well. All three reached the opposite shore without difficulty. There, the sun having quickly dried them, they put their clothes back on, having kept them dry, and held their council.

CHAPTER IV

First, the reporter told the sailor to wait for him right there, where he would meet him, and, without losing a moment, he went back up the coast in the direction that the black man Nab had taken a few hours

earlier. Then he quickly disappeared behind a corner of the shore, so eager was he to have news of the engineer.

Harbert had wanted to accompany him.

"Stay, my boy," the sailor had told him. "We have to prepare a camp and see if we can find something more solid to eat than seashells. Our friends will need to replenish their supplies when they return. To each his own task."

"I'm ready, Pencroff," replied Harbert.

"Good!" replied the sailor, "that will do. Let's proceed methodically. We are tired, we are cold, we are hungry. So we must find shelter, fire, and food. The forest has wood, the nests have eggs: all that remains is to find home."

"Well," replied Harbert, "I'll look for a cave in these rocks, and I'll eventually find some hole we can squeeze into!"

"That's right," replied Pencroff. "Let's go, my boy."

And there they were, both walking at the foot of the enormous wall, on the beach that the receding tide had largely exposed. But instead of heading north, they went south. Pencroff had noticed, a few hundred paces below where they had landed, that the coast offered a narrow

inlet which, in his opinion, must serve as the outlet for a river or stream.

On the one hand, it was important to settle in the vicinity of a potable water source, and on the other hand, it was not impossible that the current had pushed Cyrus Smith in that direction.

The high wall, as has been said, rose to a height of three hundred feet, but the block was solid throughout, and even at its base, barely lapped by the sea, it did not present the slightest crack that could serve as a temporary dwelling. It was a vertical wall, made of very hard granite, which the waves had never eroded. Toward the summit fluttered a whole world of waterfowl, and particularly various species of web-footed birds with long, compressed, and pointed beaks—very noisy birds, little frightened by the presence of man, who, no doubt for the first time, was thus disturbing their solitude. Among these web-footed birds, Pencroff recognized several skuas, a type of gull sometimes called dung gulls, and also small, voracious gulls that nested in the crevices of the granite. A gunshot fired amidst this swarm of birds would have brought down a great number of them; but to fire a gunshot, one needs a gun, and neither Pencroff nor Harbert had one.

Moreover, these gulls and skuas are barely edible, and even their eggs have a detestable taste.

However, Harbert, who had moved a little further to the left, soon spotted some rocks covered in seaweed, which the high tide would cover a few hours later. On these rocks, amidst the slippery seaweed, double-valved shellfish teemed, which hungry people could not possibly disdain. Harbert therefore called Pencroff, who hurried over.

"Hey! They're mussels!" cried the sailor. "That'll do in place of the eggs we need!"

"They are not mussels," replied young Harbert, who was carefully examining the mollusks attached to the rocks, "they are lithodomes."

—And this can be eaten? asked Pencroff.

— Perfectly.

"So, let's eat some lithodomes."

The sailor could rely on Harbert. The young boy was very gifted in natural history and had always had a true passion for the subject. His father had encouraged him in this direction, enrolling him in classes taught by the best professors in Boston, who were fond of this intelligent and hardworking child. His naturalist instincts were thus to be used more than once later on, and, for his first attempt, he didn't make a mistake.

These lithodomes were oblong shells, attached in clusters and very adherent to the rocks.

They belonged to that species of boring molluscs which dig holes in the hardest stones, and their shell was rounded at both ends, an arrangement not found in the ordinary mussel.

Pencroff and Harbert made good use of these lithodomas, which were then half-open in the sun. They ate them like oysters, and found them to have a strongly peppery flavor, which took away any regret they had for not having pepper or any other kind of condiment.

Their hunger was thus momentarily appeased, but not their thirst, which increased after they had eaten these naturally spicy mollusks. The task at hand was to find fresh water, and it was unlikely to be lacking in such a capriciously rugged region. Pencroff and Harbert, having taken the precaution of gathering a large supply of snails, which they filled their pockets and handkerchiefs with, returned to the foot of the high ground. Two hundred paces further on, they reached the gap through which, according to Pencroff's hunch, a small river must flow at full capacity. At this point, the wall seemed to have been split open by some violent Plutonian force. At its base, a small inlet was notched, the bottom of which formed a rather acute angle. The stream was one

hundred feet wide there, and its two banks, on either side, were barely twenty feet wide.

The river plunged almost directly between the two granite walls which tended to drop down upstream of the mouth; then it turned abruptly and disappeared under a thicket half a mile away.

"Here, the water! There, the wood!" said Pencroff. "Well, Harbert, all that's missing is the house!"

The river water was crystal clear. The sailor recognized that at this point in the tide, that is, at low tide, when the incoming tide wasn't reaching it, the water was fresh. Having established this important point, Harbert searched for some hollow that could serve as a refuge, but in vain. Everywhere the wall was smooth, flat, and vertical.

However, at the very mouth of the stream, and above the high seas, the scree had formed, not a cave, but a pile of enormous rocks, such as are often found in granite countries, and which bear the name "Chimneys".

Pencroff and Harbert ventured quite deep among the rocks, into those sandy corridors, which were not lacking in light, for it penetrated through the gaps left between the granite boulders, some of which were held together only by a miracle of balance. But with the light came the wind—a veritable wind of the corridors—and, with the wind, the sharp

cold from outside. However, the sailor thought that by obstructing certain sections of these corridors, by blocking some openings with a mixture of stones and sand, the "Chimneys" could be made habitable. Their geometric plan represented this typographic symbol (...), which means "et cetera" in abbreviated form. Now, by isolating the upper loop of the symbol, through which the south and west winds rushed, it would undoubtedly be possible to utilize its lower section.

"That's our problem," said Pencroff, "and if we ever saw Mr. Smith again, he would know how to make use of this labyrinth."

“We’ll see him again, Pencroff,” cried Harbert, “and when he returns, he must find a reasonably bearable dwelling here. It will be so if we can set up a hearth in the left-hand corridor and keep an opening for the smoke.”

“We can manage it, my boy,” replied the sailor, “and these Chimneys—that was the name Pencroff kept for this temporary dwelling—will do just fine. But first, let’s go and gather some fuel. I imagine the wood will be useful for plugging those openings through which the devil plays his trumpet!”

Harbert and Pencroff left the Chimneys, and, rounding the bend, they began to head up the left bank of the river. The current was quite swift and carried some driftwood. The rising tide—and it was already

making itself felt—was bound to push it back forcefully for a considerable distance. The sailor therefore thought that this ebb and flow could be used to transport heavy objects.

After walking for fifteen minutes, the sailor and the young boy reached the sharp bend in the river as it turned left. From this point, its course continued through a forest of magnificent trees. These trees had retained their greenery, despite the late season, for they belonged to that family of conifers which is found in all regions of the globe, from northern climates to tropical lands.

The young naturalist particularly recognized "deodars," species very numerous in the Himalayan region, which gave off a pleasant aroma. Between these beautiful trees grew clumps of pines, whose opaque canopies opened wide. In the middle of the tall grasses, Pencroff felt his foot crushing dry branches, which crackled like fireworks.

"Well, my boy," he said to Harbert, "if I don't know the name of these trees, I at least know how to classify them as 'firewood,' and, for the moment, that's the only one that suits us!"

"Let's make our provisions!" replied Harbert, who immediately set to work.

The harvest was easy. It wasn't even necessary to prune the trees, as enormous quantities of dead wood lay at their base. But while fuel was

plentiful, the means of transport left much to be desired. This wood, being very dry, would burn quickly. Therefore, a considerable quantity would have to be brought back to the Chimneys, and the load of two men would not have been sufficient. This is what Harbert pointed out.

"Hey, my boy," replied the sailor, "there must be a way to transport this wood. There's always a way to do anything! If we had a cart or a boat, it would be too easy."

"But we have the river!" said Harbert.

"That's right," replied Pencroff. "The river will be a self-propelled path for us, and timber rafts weren't invented for nothing."

"However," observed Harbert, "our path is currently moving in the opposite direction to ours, since the sea is rising!"

“We’ll just have to wait for it to go down,” replied the sailor, “and it will take care of transporting our fuel to the Chimneys. Let’s get our train ready.”

The sailor, followed by Harbert, headed towards the angle where the edge of the forest met the river.

Each carried a load of wood, tied into bundles, according to his strength. On the bank lay a large quantity of dead branches, amidst

grasses where no man's foot had likely ever ventured. Pencroff immediately began to assemble his raft.

In a kind of eddy created by a point of the bank that broke the current, the sailor and the young boy placed fairly large pieces of wood, which they had tied together with dry vines. This formed a sort of raft onto which they successively piled the entire harvest, a load for at least twenty men. In an hour, the work was finished, and the train, moored to the bank, had to wait for the tide to turn.

There were a few hours to fill, and, by mutual agreement, Pencroff and Harbert resolved to reach the upper plateau, in order to examine the country over a wider radius.

Precisely, two hundred paces back from the angle formed by the river, the wall, ending in a rockfall, sloped gently down to the edge of the forest. It was like a natural staircase. Harbert and the sailor began their ascent. Thanks to the strength of their legs, they reached the crest in a few moments and positioned themselves at the angle it formed over the river mouth. Upon arriving, their first glance was at the ocean they had just crossed in such terrible conditions! They gazed with emotion at this entire stretch of the northern coast where the catastrophe had occurred. It was there that Cyrus Smith had disappeared. They searched for any wreckage of their balloon, to which a man might have clung,

that might still be afloat. Nothing! The sea was nothing but a vast watery desert. As for the coast, it was deserted as well. Neither the reporter nor Nab were there. But it was possible that at that moment, they were both so far away that they could not be seen.

"Something tells me," cried Harbert, "that a man as energetic as Mr. Cyrus couldn't have let himself drown like some random person. He must have reached some point on the shore. Isn't that right, Pencroff?"

The sailor sadly shook his head. He had little hope of ever seeing Cyrus Smith again; but, wanting to leave some hope for Harbert:

"No doubt, no doubt," he said, "our engineer is the kind of man who can get himself out of trouble where anyone else would succumb!"

However, he observed the coast with extreme attention. Before him unfolded the sandy beach, bordered, on the right side of the mouth, by lines of breakers. These rocks, still above water, resembled groups of amphibians lying in the surf. Beyond the band of reefs, the sea sparkled in the sunlight. To the south, a sharp point closed the horizon, and it was impossible to discern whether the land extended in that direction or whether it turned southeast and southwest, which would have made this coast a kind of very elongated peninsula. At the northern end of the bay, the coastline continued for a considerable distance, following a

more rounded line. There, the shore was low, flat, without cliffs, with wide sandbanks exposed by the receding tide.

Pencroff and Harbert then turned westward. Their gaze was first fixed on the snow-capped mountain, which rose at a distance of six or seven miles. From its lower slopes to within two miles of the coast, vast wooded areas stretched out, punctuated by large patches of green from the presence of evergreen trees. Then, from the edge of this forest to the coast itself, a broad, verdant plateau was dotted with clumps of trees arranged haphazardly. On the left, the waters of the small river could be seen sparkling at times through occasional clearings, and it seemed that its rather meandering course was leading it back towards the foothills of the mountain, between which it must have its source. At the point where the sailor had left his raft of timber, it began to flow between the two high granite walls; but if, on its left bank, the walls remained clear and steep, on the right bank, on the contrary, they gradually lowered, the massifs changing into isolated rocks, the rocks into pebbles, the pebbles into cobbles until the tip of the point.

"Are we on an island?" murmured the sailor.

"In any case, it would seem to be quite large!" replied the young boy.

"An island, however vast it may be, would still only be an island!" said Pencroff.

But this important question could not yet be resolved. Its solution had to be postponed. As for the land itself, island or continent, it appeared fertile, pleasing in its appearance, and varied in its produce.

“That is fortunate,” observed Pencroff, “and, in our misfortune, we must thank Providence for it.

"So praise be to God!" replied Harbert, whose pious heart was full of gratitude to the Author of all things.

For a long time, Pencroff and Harbert examined this land into which their destiny had thrown them, but it was difficult to imagine, after such a cursory inspection, what the future held in store for them.

Then they returned, following the southern ridge of the granite plateau, marked by a long festoon of whimsical rocks, which took on the most bizarre shapes. There lived several hundred birds nesting in the holes in the stone. Harbert, by jumping onto the rocks, startled a whole flock of these birds.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "those are neither gulls nor seagulls!"

"So what are these birds?" asked Pencroff.

They look, I must say, like pigeons!

“Indeed, but they are wild pigeons, or rock pigeons,” replied Harbert. “I recognize them by the double black band on their wing, their white

rump, and their ash-blue plumage. Now, if the rock pigeon is good to eat, its eggs must be excellent, and if they have left any in their nests at all!”

"We won't give them time to hatch, except in the form of an omelet!" replied Pencroff cheerfully.

"But what will you make your omelet in?" asked Harbert. "In your hat?"

"Well!" replied the sailor, "I'm not enough of a wizard for that. We'll settle for soft-boiled eggs then, my boy, and I'll take care of sending off the hard-boiled ones!"

Pencroff and the young boy carefully examined the crevices in the granite, and indeed they found eggs in some of the cavities! A few dozen were collected, then placed in the sailor's handkerchief, and, as the time approached when the sea was expected to be full, Harbert and Pencroff began to descend back towards the stream.

When they reached the bend in the river, it was one o'clock in the afternoon.

The current was already reversing. They needed to take advantage of the ebb tide to bring the raft of timber to the river mouth. Pencroff had no intention of letting the raft drift aimlessly with the current, nor did he intend to board it and steer it himself. But a sailor is never at a loss

when it comes to cables or ropes, and Pencroff quickly braided a rope several fathoms long from dry vines. This woven rope was tied to the stern of the raft, and the sailor held it in his hand while Harbert, pushing the raft back with a long pole, kept it in the current.

The method worked perfectly. The enormous load of wood, which the sailor held back by walking along the bank, followed the current. The bank was very steep, there was no fear of the raft running aground, and, before two hours, it reached the mouth of the river, a few steps from the Chimneys.

CHAPTER V

Pencroff's first priority, as soon as the timber raft was unloaded, was to make the Chimneys habitable by blocking those passageways through which the air currents were flowing. Sand, stones, interwoven branches, and damp earth hermetically sealed the galleries of the (...), open to the south winds, and insulated the upper loop. A single narrow, winding passage, opening onto the side, was left to carry the smoke outside and create a draft in the hearth. The Chimneys were thus divided into three or four chambers, if indeed one can call so many dark dens by that name, dens that would scarcely satisfy a wild animal. But one was dry inside, and one could stand upright, at least in the main

chamber, which occupied the center. Fine sand covered the floor, and, all things considered, one could make do, until something better came along.

Harbert and Pencroff chatted while they worked.

"Perhaps," said Harbert, "our companions will have found a better setup than ours?"

"It's possible," replied the sailor, "but, when in doubt, don't hold back! It's better to have too many strings to your bow than none at all!"

"Ah!" repeated Harbert, "let them bring back Mr. Smith, let them find him, and we will have nothing left to do but thank heaven!"

"Yes!" murmured Pencroff. "He was a man, that one, and a real one!"

"It was..." said Harbert. "Do you despair of ever seeing him again?"

"God forbid!" replied the sailor.

The appropriation work was quickly carried out, and Pencroff declared himself very satisfied with it.

"Now," he said, "our friends can return. They will find sufficient shelter."

All that remained was to set up the fire and prepare the meal.

A simple and easy task, really. Large, flat stones were placed at the end of the first corridor on the left, at the opening of the narrow

passage that had been prepared. The heat that the smoke wouldn't carry outside would obviously be enough to maintain a comfortable temperature inside. The supply of wood was stored in one of the rooms, and the sailor placed a few logs, interspersed with kindling, on the hearth stones.

The sailor was busy with this task when Harbert asked him if he had any matches.

"Certainly," replied Pencroff, "and I would add: Fortunately, for without matches or tinder, we would be in a great predicament!"

"We could always make a fire like the savages," replied Harbert, rubbing two pieces of dry wood together.

— Well, try it, my boy, and we'll see if you manage anything other than breaking your arms!

— However, it is a very simple and widely used process in the Pacific Islands.

“I’m not saying no,” replied Pencroff, “but one must believe that the savages know how to do it, or that they use a special kind of wood, because more than once I’ve tried to make fire that way, and I’ve never been able to! So I confess that I prefer matches! Where are my matches?”

Pencroff searched his jacket for the box that never left his side, for he was a heavy smoker. He didn't find it. He searched his trouser pockets, and, to his profound astonishment, he still didn't find the box in question.

"That's stupid, more than stupid!" he said, looking at Harbert. "That box must have fallen out of my pocket, and I've lost it! But you, Harbert, don't you have anything, no lighter, nothing at all that could be used to make a fire?"

"No, Pencroff!"

The sailor went outside, followed by the young boy, both scratching their foreheads vigorously. On the sand, among the rocks, near the riverbank, they searched with the utmost care, but in vain. The box was made of copper and would not have escaped their notice.

"Pencroff," asked Harbert, "didn't you throw that box out of the gondola?"

“I was careful not to,” replied the sailor. “But when you’ve been shaken like that, such a small object can easily disappear. My pipe itself has vanished! Damn box! Where could it be?”

"Well, the sea is receding," said Harbert, "let's run back to where we landed."

It was unlikely that the box, which the waves must have rolled among the pebbles at high tide, would be found, but it was good to take this circumstance into account. Harbert and Pencroff quickly made their way to the spot where they had landed the day before, about two hundred paces from the Chimneys.

There, amidst the pebbles, in the hollows of the rocks, the search was carried out meticulously. Nothing was found. If the box had fallen there, it must have been swept away by the waves. As the sea receded, the sailor searched every crevice in the rocks, without finding anything. It was a serious loss under the circumstances, and, for the moment, irreparable.

Pencroff made no attempt to hide his profound disappointment. His brow was deeply furrowed. He didn't utter a single word. Harbert tried to console him by pointing out that, most likely, the matches would have been wet from the seawater, and that it would have been impossible to use them.

"No, my boy," replied the sailor. "They were in a copper box that closed securely! And now what?"

"We'll certainly find a way to get some fire," said Harbert. "Mr. Smith or Mr. Spilett won't be short of it like we are!"

"Yes," replied Pencroff, "but in the meantime, we are without fire, and our companions will find only a sad meal when they return!"

"But," said Harbert quickly, "it's impossible that they have neither tinder nor matches!"

“I doubt it,” replied the sailor, shaking his head. “First of all, Nab and Mr. Smith don’t smoke, and I’m afraid Mr. Spilett is more likely to have kept his notebook than his box of matches!”

Harbert didn't reply. The loss of the box was obviously regrettable. However, the young boy fully expected that a fire would be procured one way or another. Pencroff, more experienced, and although not one to be easily troubled, didn't share this view. In any case, there was only one course of action: wait for Nab and the reporter to return. But this meant giving up the meal of hard-boiled eggs he had planned to prepare for them, and the prospect of raw meat seemed unpleasant to both them and himself.

Before returning to the Chimneys, the sailor and Harbert, in case they should never have fire again, gathered more lithodomes, and they silently made their way back to their home.

Pencroff, his eyes fixed on the ground, was still searching for his elusive box. He even went up the left bank of the river from its mouth to the corner where the timber raft had been moored.

He returned to the upper plateau, he searched it in all directions, he looked in the tall grass on the edge of the forest, — all in vain.

It was five o'clock in the evening when Harbert and he returned to the Chimneys. Needless to say, the corridors were searched down to their darkest corners, and it was decided to give up.

Around six o'clock, as the sun disappeared behind the western highlands, Harbert, who was walking back and forth on the shore, signaled the return of Nab and Gideon Spilett.

They were returning alone!... The young boy felt an indescribable pang of heartache. The sailor had not been mistaken in his premonitions.

Engineer Cyrus Smith could not be found!

Upon arriving, the reporter sat down on a rock, speechless. Exhausted and starving, he lacked the strength to utter a word!

As for Nab, his reddened eyes proved how much he had cried, and new tears that he could not hold back made it all too clear that he had lost all hope!

The reporter recounted the search for Cyrus Smith. He and Nab had scoured the coastline for over eight miles, and therefore well beyond the point where the balloon had crashed the penultimate time, a crash

that had resulted in the disappearance of the engineer and the dog, Top. The beach was deserted. No trace, no footprint. Not a freshly turned pebble, not a clue in the sand, not a mark of a human foot along that entire stretch of shore. It was clear that no inhabitants frequented this part of the coast. The sea was as deserted as the shore, and it was there, a few hundred feet from the coast, that the engineer had found his grave.

At that moment, Nab stood up, and in a voice that betrayed how much feelings of hope persisted within him:

"No!" he cried, "no! He's not dead! No! It can't be! Him! Come on! Me! Anyone else, maybe! But him! Never. He's a man who can overcome anything!"

Then, his strength abandoned him:

"Ah! I can't take it anymore!" he murmured.

Harbert ran to him.

"Nab," said the young boy, "we will find him! God will give him back to us! But in the meantime, you are hungry! Eat, eat a little, I beg you!"

And, saying this, he offered the poor negro a few handfuls of shells, meager and insufficient food!

Nab hadn't eaten for many hours, but he refused. Deprived of his master, Nab could no longer, or no longer wanted to, live!

As for Gideon Spilett, he devoured these mollusks; then he lay down on the sand at the foot of a rock.

He was exhausted, but calm.

Then Harbert approached him, and, taking his hand:

"Sir," he said, "we have found a shelter where you will be better off than here. Night is falling. Come and rest! Tomorrow, we'll see..."

The reporter got up, and, guided by the young boy, he headed towards the Chimneys. At that moment, Pencroff approached him, and, in the most natural tone, asked him if, by any chance, he happened to have a match on him.

The reporter stopped, searched his pockets, found nothing, and said:

"I had some, but I had to throw it all away..."

The sailor then called Nab, made the same request, and received the same answer.

"Damn it!" cried the sailor, who could not hold back the word.

The reporter heard it, and, going to Pencroff:

"Not a match?" he said.

— Not one, and therefore no fire!

"Ah!" cried Nab, "if my master were here, he would know how to make you do it!"

The four shipwrecked men remained motionless and looked at each other, not without concern. It was Harbert who first broke the silence, saying:

"Mr. Spilett, you're a smoker, you always have matches on you! Perhaps you haven't looked properly? Look again! Just one match would be enough for us!"

The reporter searched his trouser, waistcoat, and overcoat pockets again, and finally, to Pencroff's great joy, but no less to his extreme surprise, he felt a small piece of wood lodged in the lining of his waistcoat. His fingers had grasped the small piece of wood through the fabric, but they couldn't pull it out. Since it must have been a match, and only one, he had to be careful not to damage the phosphorus.

"Will you let me do it?" the young boy said to him.

And very skillfully, without breaking it, he managed to remove this small piece of wood, this miserable and precious straw, which, for these poor people, had such great importance! It was intact.

"A match!" cried Pencroff. "Ah! It's as if we had a whole cargo of them!"

He took the match, and, followed by his companions, he returned to the Chimneys.

This small piece of wood, which in inhabited countries is given away with such indifference, and which is worthless, had to be used here with extreme care. The sailor made sure it was completely dry. Then, that done:

"We would need paper," he said.

"Here are some," replied Gideon Spilett, who, after some hesitation, tore a sheet of paper from his notebook.

Pencroff took the piece of paper that the reporter handed him, and he crouched down in front of the hearth. There, a few handfuls of dry grass, leaves and moss were placed under the bundles of kindling and arranged so that the air could circulate easily and quickly ignite the dead wood.

So Pencroff folded the piece of paper into a cone shape, as pipe smokers do in strong winds, and then he inserted it between the mosses.

Then, taking a slightly rough pebble, he carefully wiped it, and, not without his heart beating, he gently struck the match, holding his breath.

The first attempt at rubbing had no effect.

Pencroff had not pressed hard enough, fearing he would damage the phosphorus.

"No, I can't," he said, "my hand is shaking... The match would miss... I can't... I won't!"

And getting up, he tasked Harbert with replacing him.

Indeed, the young boy had never been so impressed in his life. His heart was pounding. Prometheus, stealing fire from the heavens, couldn't have been more moved! He didn't hesitate, however, and quickly struck the flint. A faint crackling sound was heard, and a small, bluish flame sprang up, producing a pungent smoke. Harbert gently turned the match over to feed the flame, then slipped it into the paper cone.

The paper caught fire in seconds, and the mosses burned immediately. A few moments later, the dry wood crackled, and a cheerful flame, fanned by the sailor's vigorous breath, grew in the darkness.

"Finally," cried Pencroff, getting up, "I have never been so moved in my life!"

It was certain that the fire worked well on the hearth of flat stones. The smoke escaped easily through the narrow flue, the chimney drew well, and a pleasant warmth soon spread.

As for the fire, care had to be taken not to let it go out, and to always keep some embers burning beneath the ashes. But this was simply a matter of care and attention, since wood was plentiful, and the supply could always be replenished when needed.

Pencroff first considered using the hearth, preparing a more substantial supper than a dish of lithodomes. Two dozen eggs were brought by Harbert. The reporter, leaning in a corner, watched these preparations without saying a word. A threefold thought occupied his mind. Was Cyrus still alive?

If he lives, where can he be? If he survived his fall, how can we explain his inability to make his existence known? As for Nab, he was prowling along the shore. He was now nothing more than a soulless body.

Pencroff, who knew fifty-two ways to prepare eggs, had no choice at this moment. He had to content himself with placing them in the hot ashes and letting them harden over a low flame. In a few minutes, they were cooked, and the sailor invited the reporter to share his supper.

Such was the first meal of the shipwrecked people on this unknown shore. These hard-boiled eggs were excellent, and, as the egg contains

all the elements essential to human nutrition, these poor people felt very well and comforted.

Ah! If only one of them hadn't been missing from that meal! If all five prisoners who had escaped from Richmond had been there, beneath those piled-up rocks, before that bright, crackling fire, on that dry sand, perhaps they would have had nothing but thanks to give to heaven! But the most ingenious, the most learned too, their undisputed leader, Cyrus Smith, was missing, alas! And his body hadn't even been given a proper burial!

And so passed that day of March 25th. Night had fallen. Outside, the wind could be heard whistling and the monotonous surf pounding the shore. The pebbles, pushed and pulled back by the waves, rolled with a deafening crash.

The reporter had withdrawn to the end of a dark corridor, after having summarily noted the incidents of that day: the first appearance of this new land, the disappearance of the engineer, the exploration of the coast, the incident of the matches, etc.; and, with fatigue helping, he managed to find some rest in sleep.

Harbert soon fell asleep. As for the sailor, keeping a watchful eye, he spent the night by the hearth, sparing no fuel. Only one of the shipwrecked men did not rest in the Chimneys. It was the inconsolable,

the despairing Nab, who, throughout the entire night, and despite his companions' pleas to urge him to rest, wandered on the shore calling for his master!

CHAPTER VI

An inventory of the objects possessed by these air castaways, washed up on a coast that appeared to be uninhabited, will be promptly established.

They had nothing but the clothes they were wearing at the time of the disaster. A notebook and a watch, which Gideon Spilett had likely kept by mistake, should be mentioned, but not a weapon, not a tool, not even a pocketknife. The passengers in the gondola had thrown everything out to lighten the balloon.

The fictional heroes of Daniel Defoe or Wyss, as well as the Selkirks and the Raynals, shipwrecked at Juan Fernandez or the Auckland Islands, were never in such utter destitution. Either they drew abundant resources from their stranded ship—seeds, livestock, tools, ammunition—or some wreck washed ashore that allowed them to meet their basic needs. They were not initially completely defenseless against nature. But here, not a single tool, not a single utensil. From nothing, they would have to make everything!

And if Cyrus Smith had been with them, if the engineer had been able to put his practical knowledge and inventive spirit to use in this situation, perhaps all hope would not have been lost! Alas!

Cyrus Smith was no longer to be seen.

The shipwrecked were to expect nothing but from themselves, and from that Providence which never abandons those whose faith is sincere.

But, first of all, should they settle on this part of the coast without trying to find out which continent it belonged to, whether it was inhabited, or whether this coastline was just the shore of a deserted island?

This was an important question to resolve as quickly as possible. The solution would determine the necessary measures. However, following Pencroff's advice, it seemed advisable to wait a few days before undertaking an exploration. It was essential, in fact, to prepare provisions and obtain a more fortifying diet than that consisting solely of eggs or shellfish. The explorers, likely to endure prolonged hardships without shelter, needed, above all, to regain their strength.

The Chimneys offered a sufficient refuge for the time being. The fire was lit, and it would be easy to keep the embers burning. For the moment, there was no shortage of shellfish and eggs among the rocks

and on the shore. They would surely find a way to kill some of the pigeons that flew by the hundreds along the crest of the plateau, even if it meant beating them with sticks or stones. Perhaps the trees in the nearby forest would bear edible fruit? Finally, there was fresh water. It was therefore agreed that they would stay at the Chimneys for a few days, in order to prepare for an exploration, either along the coast or inland.

This project suited Nab particularly well. Stubborn in his ideas and his premonitions, he was in no hurry to abandon this stretch of coast, the scene of the disaster. He didn't believe, he refused to believe, that Cyrus Smith was dead.

No, it seemed impossible to him that such a man could have met such a vulgar end, swept away by a wave, drowned in the surf, just a few hundred paces from the shore! As long as the waves had not cast up the engineer's body, as long as he, Nab, had not seen with his own eyes, touched with his own hands, the corpse of his master, he would not believe in his death!

And this idea took root more deeply than ever in his stubborn heart. An illusion perhaps, a respectable illusion nonetheless, which the sailor refused to destroy! For him, there was no more hope, and the engineer had indeed perished in the waves, but with Nab, there was no arguing.

It was like the dog that cannot leave the place where its master has fallen, and its pain was such that, probably, it would not outlive him.

That morning, March 26, at dawn, Nab had resumed his northward journey along the coast, and he had returned to where the sea, no doubt, had closed over the unfortunate Smith.

Lunch that day consisted solely of pigeon eggs and lithodome shells. Harbert had found salt deposited in the hollows of the rocks by evaporation, and this mineral substance came in very handy.

After the meal, Pencroff asked the reporter if he wanted to accompany them into the forest, where he and Harbert were going to try their luck hunting! But, on second thought, it was necessary for someone to stay behind to keep the fire going, and in the highly unlikely event that Nab needed help. So the reporter stayed.

"Let's go hunting, Harbert," said the sailor. "We'll find ammunition along the way, and we'll cut down our rifle in the forest."

But, as they were leaving, Harbert observed that, since the tinder was lacking, it might be prudent to replace it with another substance.

"Which one?" asked Pencroff.

"Burned linen," replied the young boy. "It can, if necessary, serve as tinder."

The sailor found the advice quite sensible. However, it had the drawback of requiring the sacrifice of a piece of handkerchief. Nevertheless, it was worth it, and Pencroff's large-checked handkerchief was soon reduced, in part, to a half-burned rag. This flammable material was placed in the central chamber, at the bottom of a small cavity in the rock, sheltered from all wind and moisture.

It was then nine o'clock in the morning. The weather was threatening, and the breeze was blowing from the southeast. Harbert and Pencroff rounded the corner of the Chimneys, not without having glanced at the smoke twisting at a rocky point; then, they went up the left bank of the river.

Reaching the forest, Pencroff broke two sturdy branches from the first tree he encountered, fashioning them into clubs. Harbert then used the points on a rock. Ah! What wouldn't he have given for a knife! The two hunters then advanced through the tall grass, following the riverbank. From the bend where it turned southwest, the river gradually narrowed, its banks forming a deep channel covered by a double arch of trees. To avoid getting lost, Pencroff resolved to follow the stream, which would always lead him back to his starting point. But the bank presented several obstacles: here, trees with flexible branches bending down to the level of the current; there, vines or thorns that had to be

broken with sticks. Often, Harbert would slip between the broken stumps with the agility of a young cat, and disappear into the undergrowth. But Pencroff would immediately call him back, begging him not to wander off.

However, the sailor carefully observed the layout and nature of the area. On this left bank, the ground was flat and sloped gently inwards. Sometimes damp, it then took on a marshy appearance.

One could sense an underlying network of watercourses which, through some subterranean fissure, must flow towards the river. Sometimes, too, a stream ran through the thicket, which one crossed without difficulty. The opposite bank appeared more rugged, and the valley, whose thalweg was occupied by the river, was more clearly defined there. The hill, covered with trees arranged in tiers, formed a curtain that obscured the view. Walking on this right bank would have been difficult, for the slopes dropped abruptly, and the trees, bent over the water, were held in place only by the strength of their roots.

Needless to say, this forest, like the coast already explored, was untouched by any human presence. Pencroff noticed only quadruped tracks, fresh animal footprints whose species he could not identify. Most certainly—and this was also Harbert's opinion—some had been left by formidable beasts with whom one would undoubtedly have to

contend; but nowhere was there the mark of an axe on a tree trunk, nor the remains of a fire, nor the imprint of a foot; something perhaps to be thankful for, since on this land, in the heart of the Pacific, the presence of man might have been more to be feared than desired.

Harbert and Pencroff, barely speaking, for the road was very difficult, advanced only very slowly, and after an hour's walk, they had scarcely covered a mile. So far, the hunt had been unsuccessful. However, some birds sang and fluttered beneath the branches, and appeared very wary, as if the man had instinctively inspired in them a well-founded fear. Among other birds, Harbert spotted, in a marshy part of the forest, a bird with a sharp, elongated beak, which anatomically resembled a kingfisher. However, it differed from the latter in its rather rough plumage, which had a metallic sheen.

"It must be a 'jacamar'," said Harbert, trying to get the animal within range.

"This would be a good opportunity to taste some jacamar," replied the sailor, "if that bird were in the mood to be roasted!"

At that moment, a stone, skillfully and vigorously thrown by the young boy, struck the bird at the base of its wing; but the blow was not sufficient, for the jacamar fled with all the speed of its legs and disappeared in an instant.

"How clumsy I am!" cried Harbert.

“Oh no, my boy!” replied the sailor. “The shot was well aimed, and many a man would have missed the bird. Come now! Don’t be discouraged! We’ll catch it another day!”

The exploration continued. As the hunters advanced, the more spaced-out trees became magnificent, but none produced edible fruit. Pencroff searched in vain for some of those precious palm trees that lend themselves to so many uses in domestic life, and whose presence has been reported as far north as the fortieth parallel in the northern hemisphere and only as far north as the thirty-fifth in the southern hemisphere.

But this forest consisted only of conifers, such as the deodar trees already identified by Harbert, Douglas firs similar to those that grow on the northwest coast of America, and magnificent fir trees, reaching a height of one hundred and fifty feet. At that moment, a flock of small birds with beautiful plumage and long, shimmering tails scattered among the branches, scattering their loosely attached feathers, which covered the ground with a fine down. Harbert gathered some of these feathers and, after examining them:

"They are 'courоucous'," he said.

"I would prefer a guinea fowl or a grouse," replied Pencroff; "but then again, are they good to eat?"

“They are good to eat, and even their flesh is very delicate,” Harbert continued. “Besides, if I’m not mistaken, it’s easy to approach them and kill them with blows from a stick.”

The sailor and the young boy, slipping through the grass, arrived at the foot of a tree whose lower branches were covered with small birds. These storks were waiting for the insects that serve as their food. Their feathered legs could be seen gripping tightly the middle shoots that served as their support.

The hunters then stood up, and, wielding their sticks like scythes, they mowed down entire lines of these couroucous, who had no intention of flying and stupidly allowed themselves to be shot down. A hundred were already lying on the ground when the others decided to flee.

"Well," said Pencroff, "that's game perfectly within the reach of hunters like us! We could take it by hand!"

The sailor threaded the couroucous, like cowards, using a flexible stick, and the exploration continued. It could be observed that the watercourse curved slightly, forming a hook to the south, but this detour probably did not last, as the river must have its source in the

mountain and be fed by the melting snow that covered the flanks of the central cone.

The specific purpose of this excursion, as we know, was to procure as much game as possible for the guests at Les Cheminées. It could not be said that this goal had been achieved so far. The sailor therefore actively continued his search, grumbling whenever some animal, which he didn't even have time to identify, darted away into the tall grass. If only he had had Top the dog!

But Top had disappeared at the same time as his master and probably perished with him!

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, new flocks of birds were seen among the trees, pecking at the aromatic berries, including those of juniper. Suddenly, a veritable trumpet call echoed through the forest. These strange and sonorous fanfares were produced by the gallinaceous birds known as "grouse" in the United States.

Soon, several pairs were seen, with varied plumage of tawny and brown, and brown tails. Harbert recognized the males by their two pointed wing patches, formed by the raised feathers on their necks. Pencroff deemed it essential to capture one of these gallinaceous birds, as large as a hen, and whose flesh was as good as that of a grouse. But it was difficult, for they would not let anyone approach. After several

unsuccessful attempts, which only succeeded in frightening the grouse, the sailor said to the young boy:

"Clearly, since we can't kill them in flight, we have to try to catch them in the line."

"Like a carp?" exclaimed Harbert, very surprised by the suggestion.

"Like a carp," the sailor replied seriously.

Pencroff had found half a dozen grouse nests in the grass, each containing two or three eggs. He took great care not to disturb these nests, to which their owners were sure to return. It was around these nests that he conceived the idea of setting his lines—not snares, but true hook lines. He led Harbert some distance from the nests, and there he prepared his unusual devices with the care that a disciple of Isaac Walton would have shown. Harbert followed this work with understandable interest, though he doubted its success. The lines were made of thin vines, tied together and fifteen to twenty feet long. Large, very strong thorns with curved points, obtained from a dwarf acacia bush, were tied to the ends of the vines as hooks. As for bait, large red worms crawling on the ground served as such.

Having done this, Pencroff, moving through the grass and skillfully concealing himself, placed the ends of his lines, baited with hooks, near the grouse nests; then he returned to retrieve the other end and hid

with Harbert behind a large tree. The two of them waited patiently. Harbert, it must be said, didn't have much faith in the inventive Pencroff's success. A good half hour passed, but, as the sailor had predicted, several pairs of grouse returned to their nests. They hopped about, pecking at the ground, completely unaware of the hunters' presence, who, moreover, had taken care to position themselves downwind of the birds.

Indeed, the young boy, at that moment, felt very keenly interested. He held his breath, and Pencroff, with wide eyes, open mouth, lips thrust forward as if he were about to taste a piece of grouse, was barely breathing.

However, the chickens wandered between the hooks, seemingly unconcerned. Pencroff then gave small jerks that agitated the bait, as if the worms were still alive.

Certainly, the sailor, at that moment, was experiencing a much stronger emotion than the angler, who does not see his prey coming through the waters.

The jolts soon attracted the attention of the gallinaceous birds, and the hooks were attacked with pecks. Three grouse, undoubtedly very voracious, swallowed both bait and hook. Suddenly, with a sharp jerk,

Pencroff set the hook, and the beating of wings told him that the birds were caught.

"Hurrah!" he cried, rushing towards the game, which he subdued in an instant.

Harbert clapped his hands. It was the first time he had seen birds caught on a line, but the sailor, very modest, assured him that it was not his first time, and that, moreover, he did not have the credit for the invention.

"And in any case," he added, "given the situation we're in, we should expect to see many more!"

The grouse were tied by their legs, and Pencroff, happy not to return empty-handed and seeing that the day was beginning to end, thought it appropriate to return to his home.

The direction to follow was clearly indicated by that of the river, whose course they simply had to follow back down, and, around six o'clock, quite tired from their excursion, Harbert and Pencroff returned to the Chimneys.

CHAPTER VII

Gideon Spilett, motionless with his arms crossed, stood on the shore, gazing at the sea, whose eastern horizon merged with a large black

cloud rapidly rising toward the zenith. The wind was already strong and freshening with the waning of day. The entire sky had a ominous appearance, and the first signs of a gale were clearly visible.

Harbert entered the Chimneys, and Pencroff headed towards the reporter. The latter, deeply absorbed, did not see him coming.

"We're going to have a bad night, Mr. Spilett!" said the sailor. "Rain and wind to make the petrels happy!"

The reporter, turning around, saw Pencroff, and his first words were these:

"How far from the coast do you think the gondola was hit by the wave that swept our companion away?"

The sailor was not expecting this question. He thought for a moment and replied:

“At most, two cable lengths away.”

"But what is a cable length?" asked Gideon Spilett.

— About one hundred and twenty fathoms or six hundred feet.

"So," said the reporter, "Cyrus Smith disappeared at most twelve hundred feet from the shore?"

"Approximately," replied Pencroff.

— And his dog too?

- Also.

"What surprises me," added the reporter, "assuming that our companion perished, is that Top also met his death, and that neither the dog's body nor that of his master was washed ashore!"

"That's not surprising, with such a rough sea," replied the sailor. "Besides, the currents may well have carried them further along the coast."

"So, it is indeed your opinion that our companion perished in the waves?" the reporter asked again.

— That's my opinion.

— My opinion, said Gideon Spilett, except for what I owe to your experience, Pencroff, is that the double fact of the absolute disappearance of Cyrus and Top, living or dead, has something inexplicable and implausible about it.

“I wish I could agree with you, Mr. Spilett,” replied Pencroff. “Unfortunately, my mind is made up!”

That said, the sailor returned to the Chimneys. A good fire crackled on the hearth. Harbert had just thrown in an armful of dry wood, and the flame cast great beams of light into the dark parts of the corridor.

Pencroff immediately set about preparing dinner. He thought it appropriate to include a substantial dish, as everyone needed to replenish their strength. The strings of grouse were saved for the next day, but two grouse were plucked, and soon, skewered on a stick, the birds were roasting before a blazing fire.

At seven o'clock in the evening, Nab had still not returned. This prolonged absence could only worry Pencroff about the Black man. He must have feared either that some accident had befallen him in this unknown land, or that the unfortunate man had acted out of despair. But Harbert drew entirely different conclusions from this absence. For him, if Nab was not returning, it was because a new circumstance had arisen, which had prompted him to prolong his search. And anything new could only be to Cyrus Smith's advantage.

Why hadn't Nab returned, if some hope wasn't holding him back? Perhaps he had found some clue, a footprint, a piece of wreckage that had put him on the right track? Perhaps he was following a sure trail right now? Perhaps he was near his master?...

That was the reasoning of the young boy. That was his speech.

His companions let him speak. Only the reporter nodded in agreement. But, for Pencroff, what was likely was that Nab had

extended his search along the coastline further than the day before, and that he could not yet have returned.

However, Harbert, deeply troubled by vague premonitions, repeatedly expressed his intention to go and meet Nab. But Pencroff made him understand that it would be a futile endeavor, that in this darkness and in this dreadful weather, he would be unable to find any trace of Nab, and that it was better to wait. If Nab had not reappeared by the next day, Pencroff would not hesitate to join Harbert in the search.

Gideon Spilett approved the sailor's opinion on this point that they should not divide, and Harbert had to give up his plan; but two large tears fell from his eyes.

The reporter couldn't resist kissing the generous child.

The weather had absolutely turned foul. A gust of southeasterly wind swept across the coast with unparalleled force. The sea, now receding, could be heard roaring against the edge of the first rocks offshore. The rain, whipped up by the hurricane, rose up like liquid fog.

It was like wisps of vapor trailing along the shore, the pebbles clattering violently like emptying cartloads of stones. The sand, whipped up by the wind, mingled with the downpours, making their onslaught unbearable. There was as much mineral dust as watery dust in the air. Between the river mouth and the section of the wall, great

eddies swirled, and the layers of air escaping from this maelstrom, finding no other outlet than the narrow valley at the bottom of which the stream rose, rushed in with irresistible force. Consequently, the smoke from the hearth, pushed back by the narrow passage, frequently fell back down, filling the corridors and rendering them uninhabitable.

That is why, as soon as the grouse were cooked, Pencroff let the fire die down, and kept only embers buried under the ashes.

At eight o'clock, Nab had not yet reappeared; but it could now be assumed that the dreadful weather alone had prevented his return, and that he had had to seek refuge in some hollow, to wait for the end of the storm or at least for daylight to return. As for going to meet him, attempting to find him under these conditions, it was impossible.

The game was the only dish served at supper. This meat, which was excellent, was eaten with pleasure.

Pencroff and Harbert, whose appetites had been greatly aroused by a long excursion, devoured.

Then, each retired to the corner where they had already rested the previous night, and Harbert soon fell asleep beside the sailor, who had stretched out along the hearth. Outside, as night drew on, the storm was growing to formidable proportions. It was a gale comparable to the one that had swept the prisoners from Richmond to this Pacific land.

Storms are frequent during this time of equinox, rife with catastrophes, and especially terrible on this wide field, which offers no obstacle to their fury! It is understandable, then, that a coast so exposed to the east, that is to say, directly to the hurricane's onslaught, and struck head-on, was battered with a force that no description can convey.

Fortunately, the pile of rocks that formed the Chimneys was solid. They were enormous blocks of granite, some of which, however, were not quite balanced and seemed to tremble on their bases. Pencroff felt this, and beneath his hand, resting on the walls, rapid tremors ran. But he repeated to himself, and rightly so, that there was nothing to fear, and that his improvised retreat would not collapse.

However, he could hear the sound of stones, detached from the plateau's summit and torn away by the wind's swirling currents, falling onto the shore. Some even rolled to the top of the Chimneys, or shattered there when they were hurled perpendicularly. Twice, the sailor got up and crawled to the entrance of the passage to observe outside. But these minor rockfalls posed no danger, and he returned to his place before the hearth, where the embers crackled beneath the ashes.

Despite the fury of the hurricane, the crashing of the storm, the thunder of the tempest, Harbert slept soundly. Sleep eventually

overtook Pencroff, whose life at sea had accustomed him to such violence. Only Gideon Spilett remained awake, gripped by worry. He reproached himself for not having gone with Nab. We have seen that all hope had not abandoned him. The premonitions that had troubled Harbert continued to trouble him as well. His thoughts were fixed on Nab. Why hadn't Nab returned? He turned on his bed of sand, barely paying attention to this struggle of the elements.

Sometimes, his eyes, heavy with fatigue, would close for a moment, but some quick thought would reopen them almost immediately.

However, the night was drawing on, and it may have been two o'clock in the morning, when Pencroff, who was sound asleep at the time, was shaken vigorously.

"What is it?" he exclaimed, waking up and resuming his thoughts with that particular promptness of seafarers.

The reporter was leaning over him, and saying:

"Listen, Pencroff, listen!"

The sailor listened intently and could not distinguish any sound other than that of the gusts.

"It's the wind," he said.

"No," replied Gideon Spilett, listening again, "I thought I heard..."

- What?

— The barking of a dog!

"A dog!" cried Pencroff, who jumped up.

— Yes... barking...

"That's impossible!" replied the sailor. "And besides, how could it be, with the roar of the storm..."

"Here... listen..." said the reporter.

Pencroff listened more attentively, and indeed, in a moment of calm, he thought he heard distant barking.

"Well!... said the reporter, shaking the sailor's hand.

— Yes... yes!... replied Pencroff.

"It's great! It's great!..." cried Harbert, who had just woken up, and all three of them rushed towards the opening of the Chimneys.

They had extreme difficulty getting out. The wind pushed them back. But finally, they succeeded, and could only stand upright by leaning against the rocks.

They watched, unable to speak.

The darkness was absolute. The sea, the sky, the earth, merged in an equal intensity of darkness. It seemed that there was not a single atom of diffuse light in the atmosphere.

For a few minutes, the reporter and his two companions remained like that, as if crushed by the gust, soaked by the rain, blinded by the sand.

Then, they heard those barks again in a lull in the storm, and they recognized that they must be quite far away.

It could only have been Top barking like that!

But was he alone or accompanied? It is more likely that he was alone, because, assuming that Nab was with him, Nab would have hurried towards the Chimneys.

The sailor squeezed the reporter's hand, from whom he couldn't make himself heard, in a way that meant, "Wait!" Then he went back into the corridor. A moment later, he came out again with a lit bundle of sticks, threw it into the darkness, and emitted high-pitched whistles.

At this signal, which was as expected, one might have believed, closer barking answered, and soon a dog rushed into the corridor.

Pencroff, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett followed him inside. A bundle of dry wood was thrown onto the coals. The corridor was lit by a bright flame.

"That's great!" exclaimed Harbert.

It was Top, indeed, a magnificent Anglo-Norman, which inherited from these two crossbred breeds the speed of its legs and the keenness of its sense of smell, the two qualities par excellence of the hunting dog.

It was the dog of engineer Cyrus Smith.

But he was alone! Neither his master nor Nab was with him!

However, how could his instinct have led him to the Chimneys, which he didn't know? It seemed inexplicable, especially in the middle of that dark night, and in such a storm! But, even more inexplicable, Top was neither tired, nor exhausted, nor even covered in mud or sand!

Harbert had pulled the dog towards him and was pressing its head between his hands. The dog let him and rubbed its neck against the young boy's hands.

"If the dog is found, the owner will be found too!" said the reporter.

"God willing!" replied Harbert. "Let's go! Top will guide us!"

Pencroff made no objection. He sensed that Top's arrival could disprove his conjectures.

"Let's go!" he said.

Pencroff carefully covered the coals in the hearth.

He placed some pieces of wood under the ashes, so that he would have a fire when he returned. Then, preceded by the dog, which seemed

to invite him to come with little barks, and followed by the reporter and the young boy, he rushed outside, after having taken the remains of supper.

The storm was then at its most violent, perhaps even at its peak intensity. The new moon, and therefore in conjunction with the sun, allowed not the slightest glimmer of light to filter through the clouds. Following a straight route became difficult. The best course was to rely on Top's instincts. Which is what they did. The reporter and the young boy walked behind the dog, and the sailor brought up the rear. No exchange of words would have been possible. The rain wasn't falling very heavily, as it was being pulverized by the hurricane's force, but the hurricane was terrible.

However, a circumstance greatly favored the sailor and his two companions. The wind was blowing from the southeast, and consequently, it was pushing them at their backs. The sand it violently hurled, which would otherwise have been unbearable, was now being battered from behind them, and, provided they didn't turn around, it wouldn't hinder their progress. In short, they often went faster than they intended, and quickened their pace to avoid being knocked over, but a tremendous hope doubled their strength, and this time they were no longer making their way up the shore by sheer determination. They

had no doubt that Nab had found his master and that he had sent them the faithful dog. But was the engineer alive, or was Nab summoning his companions only to pay their last respects to the body of the unfortunate Smith?

Having passed the sharp edge of the high ground from which they had prudently steered clear, Harbert, the reporter, and Pencroff stopped to catch their breath. The rocky outcrop sheltered them from the wind, and they breathed easier after the fifteen-minute walk, which had been more of a sprint.

At that moment, they could hear each other, answer each other, and when the young boy pronounced the name of Cyrus Smith, Top barked in small bursts, as if he wanted to say that his master was saved.

"Saved, right?" Harbert repeated. "Saved, Top?"

And the dog barked as if in response.

The march resumed. It was about half past two in the morning. The sea was beginning to rise, and, driven by the wind, this tide, which was a syzygy tide, threatened to be very strong. The large waves thundered against the edge of the reefs, and they assailed it with such violence that, very likely, they were passing over the islet, which was completely invisible at that time. This long breakwater no longer protected the coast, which was directly exposed to the onslaught of the open sea.

As soon as the sailor and his companions had detached themselves from the cut-off section, the wind struck them again with extreme fury. Bent over, their backs to the gust, they walked very quickly, following Top, who had no hesitation about the direction to take. They were heading north, with an endless crest of waves on their right, crashing down with a deafening roar, and on their left an obscure land whose appearance was impossible to discern.

But they sensed that it must be relatively flat, because the hurricane was now passing over them without hitting them in return, an effect that occurred when it struck the granite wall.

At four o'clock in the morning, they could estimate that they had covered a distance of five miles. The clouds had lifted slightly and no longer lingered on the ground. The gust, less humid, was spreading in very brisk, drier, and colder gusts of air. Insufficiently protected by their clothing, Pencroff, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett must have been suffering terribly, but not a single complaint escaped their lips. They were determined to follow Top wherever the intelligent animal would lead them.

Around five o'clock, day began to break. At the zenith, where the mist was less dense, a few grayish hues outlined the edges of the clouds, and soon, beneath an opaque band, a brighter line clearly delineated the sea

horizon. The crests of the waves were slightly tinged with tawny glimmers, and the foam turned white again. At the same time, to the left, the rugged parts of the coastline began to fade into indistinctness, but it was still only gray on black.

At six o'clock in the morning, day had broken. Clouds raced with tremendous speed across a relatively high area. The sailor and his companions were then about six miles from the Chimneys. They were following a very flat shore, bordered offshore by a line of rocks whose tops were the only visible at that moment, for it was high tide. To the left, the land, broken only by a few dunes bristling with thistles, presented the rather wild aspect of a vast sandy region. The coastline was only slightly indented, offering no barrier to the ocean other than a somewhat irregular chain of hillocks. Here and there, one or two trees leaned westward, their branches thrust in that direction. Farther inland, to the southwest, the edge of the last forest curved. At that moment, Top gave unmistakable signs of agitation. He went forward, came back to the sailor, and seemed to urge him to quicken his pace. The dog had then left the shore, and, driven by his admirable instinct, without showing a single hesitation, had entered between the dunes.

We followed him. The country seemed to be completely deserted. Not a single living being animated it.

The edge of the dunes, quite wide, was made up of mounds, and even hills, very capriciously distributed. It was like a little Switzerland of sand, and it took nothing less than a prodigious instinct to find one's way around it.

Five minutes after leaving the beach, the reporter and his companions arrived at a sort of excavation dug into the back of a high dune. There, Top stopped and gave a clear bark. Spilett, Harbert, and Pencroff entered the cave.

Nab was there, kneeling beside a body lying on a bed of grass...

This body was that of the engineer Cyrus Smith.

CHAPTER VIII

Nab didn't move. The sailor only threw him a word.

"Alive!" he cried.

Nab did not reply. Gideon Pilett and Pencroff turned pale. Harbert clasped his hands and remained motionless. But it was clear that the poor black man, absorbed in his grief, had neither seen his companions nor heard the sailor's words.

The reporter knelt beside the motionless body and placed his ear against the engineer's chest, partially unbuttoning his clothing. A

minute—an eternity!—passed as he tried to detect some heartbeat.

Nab had sat up a little and was looking without seeing.

Despair could not have disfigured a man's face more. Nab was unrecognizable, exhausted by fatigue, broken by grief. He believed his master was dead.

Gideon Spilett, after a long and careful observation, got up.

"He's alive!" he said.

Pencroff, in turn, knelt down beside Cyrus Smith; his ear also caught some heartbeats, and his lips, some breath that escaped from the engineer's lips.

At a word from the reporter, Harbert rushed outside to find water. A hundred paces away, he found a clear stream, clearly swollen by the previous day's rains, seeping through the sand. But there was nothing to put the water in, not a single shell in the dunes! The young boy had to content himself with dipping his handkerchief in the stream, and then he ran back to the cave.

Fortunately, the damp handkerchief was enough for Gideon Spilett, who only wanted to moisten the engineer's lips. The cool water molecules had an almost immediate effect. A sigh escaped Cyrus

Smith's chest, and it even seemed as if he was trying to utter a few words.

"We will save him!" said the reporter.

Nab had regained hope at these words. He undressed his master to see if the body showed any injury. Neither the head, nor the torso, nor the limbs had any bruises, not even abrasions, which was surprising, since Cyrus Smith's body must have been rolled among the rocks; the hands themselves were intact, and it was difficult to explain how the engineer bore no trace of the efforts he must have made to cross the line of reefs.

But the explanation for this circumstance would come later. When Cyrus Smith could speak, he would say what had happened. For the moment, it was a matter of bringing him back to life, and it was likely that some friction would lead to this outcome.

This is what was done with the sailor's smock.

The engineer, warmed by the rough massage, moved his arm slightly, and his breathing began to return to a more regular rhythm. He was dying of exhaustion, and certainly, without the arrival of the reporter and his companions, Cyrus Smith would have been finished.

"So you thought your master was dead?" the sailor asked Nab.

"Yes! Dead!" replied Nab, "and if Top hadn't found you, if you hadn't come, I would have buried my master and died beside him!"

We can see how close Cyrus Smith's life had come to being!

Nab then recounted what had happened. The day before, after leaving the Chimneys at dawn, he had gone up the coast in a north-north direction and reached the part of the coastline he had already visited.

There, without any hope, he admitted, Nab had searched on the shore, among the rocks, on the sand, for the slightest clues that could guide him.

He had examined especially the part of the beach that the high tide hadn't covered, because along its edge, the ebb and flow must have erased all traces. Nab no longer hoped to find his master alive. He was going there to discover a corpse, a corpse he wanted to bury with his own hands!

Nab had searched for a long time. His efforts remained fruitless. It did not appear that this deserted coast had ever been frequented by a human being. The shells, those that the sea could not reach—and which were found by the millions beyond the tidal range—were intact. Not a single crushed shell. Over a stretch of two to three hundred yards, there was no trace of a landing, neither ancient nor recent.

Nab had therefore decided to go up the coast for a few miles. It was possible that the currents had carried a body to some point further away.

When a corpse floats a short distance from a flat shore, it is rare that the current will not wash it back there sooner or later. Nab knew this, and he wanted to see his master one last time.

"I walked along the coast for another two miles, I visited the whole line of reefs at low tide, the whole beach at high tide, and I was despairing of finding anything, when yesterday, around five o'clock in the evening, I noticed footprints on the sand.

"Footprints?" exclaimed Pencroff.

— Yes! replied Nab.

"And these footprints started right at the reefs?" asked the reporter.

— No, replied Nab, only at the tide relay, because between the relays and the reefs, the others must have been erased.

“Continue, Neb,” said Gideon Spilett.

“When I saw those footprints, I went crazy. They were very recognizable and led towards the dunes. I followed them for a quarter of a mile, running, but careful not to erase them. Five minutes later, as

night was falling, I heard a dog barking. It was Top, and Top led me right here, to my master!”

Nab finished his story by describing the pain he had felt upon finding the lifeless body. He had tried to find some remaining trace of life within it!

Now that he had found him dead, he wanted him alive! All his efforts had been in vain! He had no choice but to pay his last respects to the one he loved so much!

Nab then thought of his companions. They would undoubtedly want to see the unfortunate man one last time! Top was there. Couldn't he rely on the wisdom of his faithful animal? Nab repeatedly called out the reporter's name, the name of the engineer's companions that Top knew best. Then he pointed to the southern coast, and the dog darted off in the direction indicated.

We know how, guided by an instinct that can be regarded almost as supernatural, because the animal had never been to the Chimneys, Top nevertheless succeeded.

Nab's companions had listened to this story with extreme attention.

They found it inexplicable that Cyrus Smith, after the effort he had made to escape the waves by crossing the reefs, didn't have a single scratch. And what was even more inexplicable was how the engineer

could have reached that cave, hidden among the dunes, more than a mile from the coast.

"So, Nab," said the reporter, "it wasn't you who transported your master to this place?"

"No, it wasn't me," replied Nab.

"It is quite obvious that Mr. Smith came there alone," said Pencroff.

"That's obvious, indeed," observed Gideon Spilett, "but it's unbelievable!"

The explanation for this could only come from the engineer himself. For that, we had to wait until he regained his speech. Fortunately, life was already returning to normal. The friction had restored blood circulation. Cyrus Smith moved his arms again, then his head, and a few incomprehensible words escaped his lips once more.

Nab, leaning over him, called to him, but the engineer seemed not to hear, and his eyes remained closed. Life revealed itself to him only through movement. The senses had no part in it yet.

Pencroff deeply regretted not having a fire, nor the means to get one, for he had unfortunately forgotten to bring the burnt linen, which he could easily have set alight with the clash of two stones. As for the engineer's pockets, they were completely empty, except for the one in

his waistcoat, which contained his watch. Cyrus Smith therefore had to be transported to the Chimneys, and as soon as possible. This was the opinion of everyone.

However, the care lavished on the engineer restored his consciousness more quickly than expected. The water used to moisten his lips gradually revived him. Pencroff also had the idea of mixing some of the grouse flesh he had brought with him into this water. Harbert, having run to the shore, returned with two large bivalve shells. The sailor prepared a sort of mixture and placed it between the engineer's lips, who seemed to eagerly inhale the concoction.

His eyes then opened. Nab and the reporter had leaned over him.

"My master! My master!" cried Nab.

The engineer heard him. He recognized Nab and Spilett, then his two other companions, Harbert and the sailor, and his hand lightly pressed theirs. A few more words escaped his lips—words he had undoubtedly spoken before, and which revealed the thoughts that tormented his mind even then. This time, those words were understood.

"Island or continent?" he murmured.

“Ah!” cried Pencroff, unable to suppress the exclamation. “By all the devils, we don’t care, as long as you live, Mr. Cyrus! Island or continent? We’ll see later.”

The engineer gave a slight affirmative nod, and seemed to fall asleep.

This sleep was respected, and the reporter immediately made arrangements for the engineer to be transported in the best possible conditions. Nab, Harbert, and Pencroff left the cave and headed towards a high dune crowned with a few stunted trees. And, as they walked, the sailor couldn't help but repeat:

"Island or continent! To think of that when all you have left is your breath! What a man!"

Having reached the top of the dune, Pencroff and his two companions, with no other tools than their arms, stripped a rather sickly tree, a kind of maritime pine emaciated by the winds, of its main branches; then, from these branches, they made a litter which, once covered with leaves and grass, would allow the engineer to be transported.

It was a matter of about forty minutes, and it was ten o'clock when the sailor, Nab and Harbert returned to Cyrus Smith, whom Gideon Spilett had not left.

The engineer was just waking from this sleep, or rather this drowsiness, in which he had been found. Color was returning to his cheeks, which until then had been deathly pale. He sat up a little, looked around him, and seemed to ask where he was.

"Can you hear me without getting tired, Cyrus?" said the reporter.

— Yes, replied the engineer.

"I think," said the sailor then, "that Mr. Smith will hear you even better if he goes back to that grouse jelly—for it is grouse, Mr. Cyrus," he added, presenting him with some of this jelly, to which he mixed, this time, pieces of flesh.

Cyrus Smith chewed these pieces of the grouse, the remains of which were shared among his three companions, who were suffering from hunger, and found the lunch rather meager.

"Good!" said the sailor, "the provisions await us at the Chimneys, for it is good that you know, Mr. Cyrus, we have a house down south with rooms, beds, and a hearth, and in the pantry, a few dozen birds that our Harbert calls couroucous. Your litter is ready, and as soon as you feel strong enough, we will transport you to our home."

"Thank you, my friend," replied the engineer, "another hour or two, and we can leave... And now, speak, Spilett."

The reporter then recounted what had happened. He told of these events that Cyrus Smith must have been unaware of: the final fall of the balloon, the landing on this unknown land, which seemed deserted, whatever it might be, be it an island or a continent, the discovery of the Chimneys, the search undertaken to find the engineer, Nab's devotion, all that was owed to the intelligence of the faithful Top, etc.

"But," asked Cyrus Smith, his voice still weak, "didn't you pick me up on the shore?"

"No," replied the reporter.

— And it wasn't you who brought me back to this cave?

- No.

— How far is this cave from the reefs?

"About half a mile," replied Pencroff, "and if you are astonished, Mr. Cyrus, we are no less surprised ourselves to see you in this place!"

"Indeed," replied the engineer, who was gradually reviving and taking an interest in these details, "indeed, that is quite peculiar!"

"But," the sailor continued, "can you tell us what happened after you were swept away by the wave?"

Cyrus Smith recalled his memories. He knew little. The sudden swell had torn him from the balloon's net. He sank to a depth of a few fathoms. Back on the surface of the sea, in the dim light, he felt a living being stir near him. It was Top, who had rushed to his aid. Looking up, he could no longer see the balloon, which, relieved of his weight and that of the dog, had taken off like an arrow. He found himself in the midst of these raging waves, at least half a mile from the shore. He tried to fight the waves by swimming vigorously. Top supported him with his

clothes; but a lightning current seized him, drove him northward, and, after half an hour of struggle, he sank, dragging Top with him into the abyss. From that moment until he found himself in the arms of his friends, he had no memory of anything.

"However," Pencroff continued, "you must have been thrown onto the shore, and had the strength to walk all the way here, since Nab has found your footprints!"

"Yes... it must be done..." replied the engineer, thinking for a moment. "And you haven't seen any trace of human beings on this coast?"

"No trace," replied the reporter. "Besides, if by chance some savior had happened to be there, just in time, why would he have abandoned you after pulling you from the waves?"

"You're right, my dear Spilett." "Tell me, Nab," added the engineer, turning to his servant, "it wasn't you who... you didn't have a moment of absence... during which... No, that's absurd... Do any of those prints still exist?" asked Cyrus Smith.

"Yes, my master," replied Nab, "look, at the entrance, on the very back of this dune, in a place sheltered from the wind and rain. The others have been washed away by the storm."

“Pencroff,” replied Cyrus Smith, “will you take my shoes and see if they absolutely match these prints?”

The sailor did as the engineer asked. He and Harbert, guided by Nab, went to the place where the footprints were, while Cyrus Smith told the reporter:

"Inexplicable things happened there!"

"Inexplicable, indeed!" replied Gideon Spilett.

"But let's not dwell on it now, my dear Spilett, we'll talk about it later."

A moment later, the sailor, Nab and Harbert returned.

There was no doubt about it. The engineer's shoes fit exactly into the preserved footprints. Therefore, it was Cyrus Smith who had left them in the sand.

"Come on," he said, "it was I who experienced this hallucination, this absence that I attributed to Nab! I walked like a sleepwalker, without being aware of my steps, and it was Top who, in his instinct, led me here, after pulling me from the waves... Come, Top! Come, my dog!"

The magnificent animal leaped up to its master, barking, and was showered with affection.

It will be agreed that there was no other explanation to be given for the events which led to the rescue of Cyrus Smith, and that Top deserved all the credit for the affair.

Around noon, Pencroff asked Cyrus Smith if he could be transported, and Cyrus Smith, by way of reply, and with an effort that attested to the most energetic will, stood up.

But he had to lean on the sailor, because he would have fallen.

"Good! Good! said Pencroff! — Mr. Engineer’s litter.”

The bedding was brought in. The crossbeams had been covered with moss and long grasses. Cyrus Smith was laid on it, and they headed towards the coast, Pencroff at one end of the stretchers, Nab at the other.

It was eight miles to cover, but as we wouldn't be able to go fast, and we might have to stop frequently, we had to count on a period of at least six hours before reaching the Chimneys.

The wind was still fierce, but fortunately it had stopped raining. Lying down, the engineer, leaning on his arm, observed the coast, especially the part facing away from the sea. He didn't speak, but he watched, and surely the shape of this region, with its varied terrain, its forests, its diverse products, was imprinted on his mind.

However, after two hours of driving, fatigue got the better of him, and he fell asleep on the bedding.

At half past five, the small group arrived at the cut corner, and, a little later, in front of the Chimneys.

They all stopped, and the litter was placed on the sand. Cyrus Smith was fast asleep and did not wake up.

Pencroff, to his utter surprise, could then see that the terrible storm of the previous day had altered the landscape. Significant landslides had occurred. Large blocks of rock lay scattered on the beach, and a thick carpet of seagrass, kelp, and algae covered the entire shoreline. It was clear that the sea, surging over the islet, had reached the very foot of the enormous granite curtain wall. In front of the Chimneys opening, the ground, deeply eroded, had been violently battered by the waves.

Pencroff had a premonition that crossed his mind. He rushed into the corridor.

Almost immediately, he would come out of it and remain motionless, looking at his companions...

The fire was out. The drowned ashes were now nothing but mud. The burnt linen, meant to serve as tinder, had vanished. The sea had penetrated to the very back of the corridors, and turned everything upside down, destroyed everything inside the Chimneys!

CHAPTER IX

In a few words, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, and Nab were informed of the situation. This accident, which could have very serious consequences—at least Pencroff envisioned it that way—produced various effects on the honest sailor's companions.

Nab, overjoyed to have found his master again, did not listen, or rather did not even want to concern himself with what Pencroff was saying.

Harbert, for his part, seemed to share the sailor's apprehensions to some extent.

As for the reporter, in response to Pencroff's words, he simply replied:

"Upon my word, Pencroff, that's all the same to me!"

— But, I repeat, we have no more fire!

— Pfft!

— Nor any way to turn it back on.

— Enough!

— However, Mr. Spilett...

"Isn't Cyrus here?" replied the reporter. "Isn't our engineer alive? He'll find a way to make us a fire!"

— And with what?

"With nothing."

What would Pencroff have replied? He wouldn't have, because deep down, he shared the confidence his companions had in Cyrus Smith. The engineer was, for them, a microcosm, a composite of all human science and intelligence! It was as good to be with Cyrus on a desert island as without him in the most industrious villa in the Union. With him, one could want for nothing.

With him, one could not despair. If someone had told these good people that a volcanic eruption was going to destroy this land, that this land was going to sink into the abyss of the Pacific, they would have imperturbably replied: "Cyrus is here! Look at Cyrus!"

Meanwhile, however, the engineer was still plunged into a new state of prostration brought on by the journey, and his ingenuity could not be called upon at this time. Supper was bound to be very meager. Indeed, all the grouse meat had been consumed, and there was no way to cook any game.

Moreover, the couroucous that served as a reserve had disappeared. A plan had to be devised.

First of all, Cyrus Smith was transported to the central corridor. There, they managed to arrange a layer of seaweed and kelp that had remained more or less dry for him.

The deep sleep that had overcome him could only quickly restore his strength, and perhaps better than abundant food would have done.

Night had fallen, and with it, the temperature, altered by a shift in the northeast wind, dropped considerably. Now, as the sea had destroyed the partitions Pencroff had erected in certain sections of the corridors, drafts arose, making the Chimneys barely habitable. The engineer would therefore have found himself in rather poor conditions had his companions not carefully covered him, stripping off their jackets or tunics.

That evening, supper consisted solely of those inevitable snails, of which Harbert and Nab gathered a considerable quantity on the shore. However, to these mollusks, the young boy added a certain amount of edible seaweed, which he collected from high rocks whose faces were only wetted by the sea during spring tides. This seaweed, belonging to the Fucaceae family, was a type of sargassum which, when dried, yields a gelatinous substance quite rich in nutrients. The reporter and his companions, after having consumed a considerable amount of snails, then sucked on the sargassum, which they found to have a very tolerable taste, and it must be said that, on the Asian shores, it constitutes a significant part of the natives' diet.

"Never mind!" said the sailor, "it's time Mr. Cyrus came to our aid."

However, the cold became very intense and, unfortunately, there was no way to combat it.

The sailor, truly vexed, tried every possible means to get a fire. Nab even helped him in this endeavor. He had found some dry moss, and by striking two pebbles together, he produced sparks; but the moss, not being flammable enough, did not catch, and besides, these sparks, which were merely glowing flint, did not have the consistency of those that fly from the steel in a regular lighter. The operation was therefore unsuccessful.

Pencroff, though he had no faith in the method, then tried rubbing two pieces of dry wood together, in the manner of savages. Certainly, the movement he and Nab made, had it been transformed into heat according to the new theories, would have been enough to boil a steamer's boiler! The result was nil. The pieces of wood heated up, that's all, and even then, much less than the men themselves.

After an hour of work, Pencroff was drenched in sweat, and he threw down the pieces of wood in despair.

"When people try to tell me that savages light fires that way," he said, "it'll be hot, even in winter! I'd rather light my arms by rubbing them together!"

The sailor was wrong to deny the method. It is a well-known fact that savages set fire to wood by means of rapid friction. But not every type of wood is suitable for this operation, and then there is "the stroke," as the saying goes, and it is likely that Pencroff did not have "the stroke."

Pencroff's bad mood didn't last long. Harbert had taken up the two pieces of wood he'd rejected and was working even harder to rub them together. The sturdy sailor couldn't help but laugh, seeing the teenager succeeding where he himself had failed.

"Rub, my boy, rub!" he said.

“I’m rubbing,” Harbert replied, laughing, “but I have no other aim than to warm myself up instead of shivering, and soon I’ll be as hot as you, Pencroff!”

Which is what happened. Whatever the case, it was necessary to forgo obtaining a fire for that night.

Gideon Spilett repeated for the twentieth time that Cyrus Smith would not be embarrassed by so little.

And, in the meantime, he lay down in one of the corridors, on the layer of sand. Harbert, Nab and Pencroff imitated him, while Top slept at his master's feet.

The next day, March 28, when the engineer woke up around eight o'clock in the morning, he saw his companions near him, who were waiting for him to wake up, and, as the day before, his first words were:

"Island or continent?"

As we can see, that was his obsession.

"Well!" replied Pencroff, "we don't know anything about it, Mr. Smith!"

— You don't know yet?...

"But we'll know," added Pencroff, "when you've piloted us through that country."

"I believe I am in a position to try it," replied the engineer, who, without too much effort, got up and stood.

"That's good!" cried the sailor.

“I was dying mostly of exhaustion,” replied Cyrus Smith. “My friends, a little food, and it will be as good as new.” “You have a fire, don’t you?”

This request did not receive an immediate response.

But, after a few moments:

"Alas! We have no fire," said Pencroff, "or rather, Mr. Cyrus, we have none left!"

And the sailor recounted what had happened the day before. He cheered up the engineer by telling him the story of their only match, then his failed attempt to obtain fire in the manner of savages.

"We'll see," replied the engineer, "and if we can't find a substance similar to tinder..."

"Well?" asked the sailor.

— Well, we'll make some matches.

— Chemical?

— Chemicals!

"It's no more difficult than that," exclaimed the reporter, slapping the sailor on the shoulder.

He didn't find it so simple, but he didn't protest. They all went outside. The weather had turned beautiful again. A bright sun was rising over the sea horizon, and dabbed the prismatic roughness of the enormous wall with golden flecks.

After taking a quick look around, the engineer sat down on a piece of rock. Harbert offered him a few handfuls of mussels and sargassum, saying:

"That's all we have, Mr. Cyrus."

"Thank you, my boy," replied Cyrus Smith, "that will suffice—for this morning, at least."

And he ate this meager food with relish, washing it down with a little fresh water, drawn from the river in a large shell.

His companions watched him without speaking. Then, after having eaten his fill as best he could, Cyrus Smith, crossing his arms, said:

"So, my friends, you still do not know whether fate has cast us onto a continent or an island?"

"No, Mr. Cyrus," replied the young boy.

"We'll know tomorrow," the engineer continued. "Until then, there's nothing to be done."

"Yes," replied Pencroff.

— What is it?

"Fire," said the sailor, who also had his own fixed idea.

"We will do so, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith. "While you were transporting me yesterday, did I not see, in the west, a mountain overlooking this region?"

"Yes," replied Gideon Spilett, "a mountain that must be quite high..."

"Good," the engineer continued. "Tomorrow, we will climb to its summit, and we will see if this land is an island or a continent. Until

then, I repeat, nothing can be done."

"Yes, fire!" said the stubborn sailor again.

"But we'll make a fire!" replied Gideon Spilett. "Just a little patience, Pencroff!"

The sailor looked at Gideon Spilett with an expression that seemed to say, "If you're the only one who can make it, we won't be getting any roast meat anytime soon!" But he remained silent.

However, Cyrus Smith had not replied. He seemed quite unconcerned about this question of fire. For a few moments, he remained absorbed in his thoughts. Then, speaking again:

"My friends," he said, "our situation may be deplorable, but in any case, it is very simple."

Either we are on a continent, and then, at the cost of greater or lesser hardship, we will reach some inhabited place, or we are on an island. In the latter case, one of two things will happen: if the island is inhabited, we will see to it that we can manage with its inhabitants; if it is deserted, we will see to it that we can manage on our own.

"It is certain that nothing could be simpler," replied Pencroff.

"But whether it's a continent or an island," asked Gideon Spilett, "where do you think, Cyrus, that this hurricane has thrown us?"

“Actually, I can’t know for sure,” replied the engineer, “but the evidence points to a Pacific island. Indeed, when we left Richmond, the wind was blowing from the northeast, and its very force proves that its direction must not have changed. If this direction has remained from northeast to southwest, we have crossed the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico itself (in its narrowest part), and then a portion of the Pacific Ocean. I estimate the distance traveled by the balloon to be no less than six to seven thousand miles, and if the wind has shifted by even a quarter turn, it must have carried us either to the Mendana Archipelago, or to the Pomotou Islands, or even, if it had a greater speed than I suppose, to the shores of New Zealand. If this last hypothesis is correct, our return home will be easy.” English or Maori, we will always find someone to talk to. If, on the other hand, this coast belongs to some deserted island in a Micronesian archipelago, perhaps we will be able to recognize it from the top of this cone that dominates the region, and then we will consider settling here, as if we were never to leave!

"Never!" cried the reporter. "You say: never! my dear Cyrus?"

"It's better to assume the worst-case scenario right away," replied the engineer, "and leave only the surprise of the best-case scenario."

"Well said!" replied Pencroff. "And we must also hope that this island, if it is one, will not be located precisely outside the shipping lanes! That would truly be playing with fire!"

"We will not know what to expect until we have, first and foremost, climbed the mountain," replied the engineer.

"But tomorrow, Mr. Cyrus," asked Harbert, "will you be able to endure the fatigues of this climb?"

"I hope so," replied the engineer, "but on the condition that Master Pencroff and you, my child, prove to be intelligent and skillful hunters."

"Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor, "since you speak of game, if, upon my return, I were as certain of being able to roast it as I am certain of bringing it back..."

"Always report back, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith.

It was therefore agreed that the engineer and the reporter would spend the day at Les Cheminées, in order to examine the coastline and the upper plateau. Meanwhile, Nab, Harbert, and the sailor would return to the forest, replenish their wood supply, and hunt any feathered or furred creature that came within their reach.

So they left, around ten o'clock in the morning, Harbert confident, Nab cheerful, Pencroff murmuring to himself:

"If, upon my return, I find a fire in the house, it will be because thunder himself came and lit it!"

The three of them went up the bank, and, having reached the bend in the river, the sailor stopped and said to his two companions:

"Do we start by being hunters or lumberjacks?"

"Hunters," replied Harbert. "Top is already on the hunt."

"Let's hunt then," the sailor replied; "then we'll come back here to gather our wood."

That said, Harbert, Nab and Pencroff, after tearing three sticks from the trunk of a young fir tree, followed Top, who was leaping through the tall grass.

This time, instead of following the river, the hunters ventured more directly into the heart of the forest. The trees were still the same, mostly belonging to the pine family. In some less dense patches, standing alone in clumps, these pines were of considerable size and seemed to indicate, by their growth, that this region lay at a higher latitude than the engineer had assumed. A few clearings, bristling with stumps rotted by time, were covered with dead wood, thus forming inexhaustible reserves of fuel. Then, beyond the clearing, the undergrowth thickened and became almost impenetrable.

Navigating through these dense thickets of trees, without any marked paths, was quite difficult. So, from time to time, the sailor marked his route with a few short, easily recognizable tracks. But perhaps he had been wrong not to follow the stream upstream, as he and Harbert had done during their first excursion, for after an hour's walk, not a single animal had yet appeared. Running beneath the low-hanging branches only alerted birds that were impossible to approach. The grouse themselves were completely invisible, and it was likely that the sailor would be forced to return to that marshy part of the forest where he had so successfully fished for grouse.

"Hey! Pencroff," said Nab somewhat sarcastically, "if this is all the game you promised to bring back to my master, it won't take much to roast it!"

"Patience, Nab," replied the sailor, "there will be no shortage of game on the return journey!"

— So you don't trust Mr. Smith?

- If.

— But you don't think he'll make a fire?

— I'll believe it when the wood is blazing in the fireplace.

— It will burn, since my master said so!

"We'll see!"

However, the sun had not yet reached the highest point of its journey above the horizon.

The exploration continued, and was usefully marked by Harbert's discovery of a tree with edible fruit. It was the pigeon pine, which produces an excellent kernel, highly prized in the temperate regions of America and Europe. These kernels were perfectly ripe, and Harbert pointed them out to his two companions, who enjoyed them immensely.

"Come now," said Pencroff, "seaweed for bread, raw mussels for meat, and almonds for dessert, that's the kind of dinner people eat who don't have a single match left in their pocket!"

"There's no point in complaining," replied Harbert.

"I'm not complaining, my boy," replied Pencroff. "I'm just repeating that the meat is a bit too skimpy in this kind of meal!"

"Top saw something!" cried Nab, who ran towards a thicket in the middle of which the dog had disappeared barking.

Top's barking was mingled with peculiar growls.

The sailor and Harbert had followed Nab. If there was any game there, it wasn't the time to discuss how to cook it, but rather how to seize it.

The hunters, barely having entered the thicket, saw Top struggling with an animal he was holding by an ear. This quadruped was a kind of pig about two and a half feet long, blackish brown but less dark on the belly, with hard, sparse hair, and whose toes, then firmly pressed to the ground, seemed to be joined by membranes.

Harbert thought he recognized in this animal a capybara, that is to say one of the largest specimens of the order of rodents.

However, the capybara didn't struggle against the dog. It stupidly rolled its large eyes, deeply embedded in a thick layer of fat. Perhaps it was seeing humans for the first time.

However, Nab, having secured his stick in his hand, was about to stun the rodent, when the latter, tearing itself from Top's teeth, who kept only a bit of his ear, gave a vigorous grunt, rushed at Harbert, knocked him half over, and disappeared through the woods.

"Ah! The wretch!" cried Pencroff.

Immediately all three had set off in pursuit of Top, and just as they were about to catch up with him, the animal disappeared beneath the waters of a vast pond, shaded by large, ancient pine trees.

Nab, Harbert, and Pencroff had stopped, motionless. Top had jumped into the water, but the capybara, hidden at the bottom of the pond, was no longer visible.

"Let's wait," said the young boy, "for he will soon come to breathe at the surface."

"Won't he drown?" asked Nab.

“No,” replied Harbert, “since it has webbed feet, and is practically an amphibian. But let’s keep an eye on it.”

Top had stayed swimming. Pencroff and his two companions each went to occupy a point on the bank, in order to cut off any retreat to the capybara, which the dog was looking for by swimming on the surface of the pond.

Harbert was right. After a few minutes, the animal resurfaced. Top leaped onto it, preventing it from diving again. A moment later, the capybara, dragged to the bank, was stunned with a blow from Nab's stick.

"Hurrah!" cried Pencroff, who readily used this cry of triumph. "Just a burning coal, and this rodent will be eaten to the bone!"

Pencroff loaded the capybara onto his shoulder, and, judging by the height of the sun that it must be about two o'clock, he gave the signal to return.

Top's instinct proved invaluable to the hunters, who, thanks to the intelligent animal, were able to retrace their steps. Half an hour later,

they reached the bend in the river.

As he had done the first time, Pencroff quickly set up a timber raft, although, for lack of fire, it seemed to him a useless task, and, with the raft following the course of the water, they returned towards the Chimneys.

But the sailor had not gone fifty paces before he stopped, let out another tremendous hurrah, and, stretching his hand towards the corner of the cliff:

"Harbert! Nab! Look!" he cried.

Smoke was rising and swirling above the rocks!

CHAPTER X

A few moments later, the three hunters were standing before a crackling fire. Cyrus Smith and the reporter were there. Pencroff watched them both, without saying a word, his capybara in his hand.

"Well, yes, my good man," cried the reporter. "Fire, real fire, which will perfectly roast this magnificent game that we will feast on in a moment!"

— But who lit it?... asked Pencroff.

"The sun!"

Gideon Spilett's answer was correct. It was the sun that had provided the heat that Pencroff marveled at. The sailor couldn't believe his eyes, and he was so astonished that he didn't think to question the engineer.

"So you had a contact lens, sir?" Harbert asked Cyrus Smith.

"No, my child," he replied, "but I did make one."

And he showed the device he had used as a lens. It was simply the two lenses he had removed from the reporter's watch and his own. After filling them with water and making their edges sticky with a little clay, he had thus fashioned a veritable lens, which, by concentrating the sun's rays onto a very dry piece of moss, had caused it to burn.

The sailor considered the device, then looked at the engineer without uttering a word. But his gaze spoke volumes! If, for him, Cyrus Smith wasn't a god, he was certainly more than a man. Finally, his voice returned, and he exclaimed:

"Write that down, Mr. Spilett, write that down on your paper!"

"Noted," replied the reporter.

Then, with Nab's help, the sailor positioned the spit, and the capybara, properly gutted, soon grilled, like a simple suckling pig, in front of a clear and sparkling flame.

The Chimneys had become more habitable again, not only because the corridors were warmed by the fire in the hearth, but because the stone and sand partitions had been restored.

As we can see, the engineer and his companion had made good use of the day. Cyrus Smith had almost fully recovered his strength and had tested himself by climbing onto the upper plateau. From this vantage point, his eye, accustomed to judging heights and distances, had long been fixed on the cone whose summit he intended to reach the next day. The mountain, situated about six miles to the northwest, appeared to him to measure 3,500 feet above sea level. Consequently, the gaze of an observer stationed at its summit could sweep across the horizon to a radius of at least 50 miles.

It was therefore likely that Cyrus Smith would easily resolve this "continent or island" question, to which he, not without reason, gave precedence over all others.

We had a proper supper. The capybara was declared excellent. Sargassum seaweed and pine nuts completed the meal, during which the engineer spoke little. He was preoccupied with the plans for the next day. Once or twice, Pencroff offered some ideas about what should be done, but Cyrus Smith, who was clearly a methodical mind, simply shook his head.

"Tomorrow," he repeated, "we will know where we stand, and we will act accordingly."

The meal finished, fresh bundles of wood were thrown onto the hearth, and the guests of the Chimneys, including faithful Top, fell into a deep sleep. No incident disturbed this peaceful night, and the next day —March 29—refreshed and ready, they awoke, prepared to undertake the excursion that would determine their fate.

Everything was ready for departure. The remains of the capybara could feed Cyrus Smith and his companions for another twenty-four hours. Besides, they fully expected to resupply along the way. Since the glasses had been returned to the engineer's and reporter's watches, Pencroff burned some of the cloth that was to serve as tinder. As for flint, there should be no shortage of it in these Plutonian-derived terrains.

It was half past seven in the morning when the explorers, armed with walking sticks, left the Chimneys. Following Pencroff's advice, it seemed best to take the path already traveled through the forest, even if it meant returning by another route. It was also the most direct way to reach the mountain. So they rounded the southern corner and followed the left bank of the river, which they left at the point where it bent to the southwest. The path, already broken under the green trees, was

found again, and at nine o'clock, Cyrus Smith and his companions reached the western edge of the forest.

The ground, until then relatively flat, marshy at first, then dry and sandy, sloped gently upwards from the coast towards the interior. A few skittish animals had been glimpsed beneath the trees. Top quickly flushed them out, but his master immediately called him back, for the time was not yet ripe for pursuit. Later, they would see. The engineer was not one to be distracted from his fixed idea. One would not be mistaken in saying that he observed neither the landscape nor its natural features. His sole objective was this mountain he intended to climb, and he headed straight for it.

At ten o'clock, we paused for a few minutes. Upon emerging from the forest, the region's topography became apparent. The mountain consisted of two cones. The first, truncated at a height of approximately 2,500 feet, was supported by capricious buttresses that seemed to branch out like the claws of an immense talons pressed against the ground. Between these buttresses lay numerous narrow valleys, bristling with trees, the last clumps of which rose up to the truncated cone. However, the vegetation appeared less dense on the northeast-facing side of the mountain, where we could see rather deep striations, which must have been lava flows. Resting on the first cone was a second

cone, slightly rounded at its summit, and positioned somewhat askew. It looked like a large, round hat perched on its ear. It appeared to be formed of bare earth, pierced in many places by reddish rocks.

It was the summit of this second cone that needed to be reached, and the ridge of the foothills should offer the best route to get there.

"We are on volcanic terrain," Cyrus Smith had said, and his companions, following him, began to rise little by little on the back of a buttress, which, by a winding line and consequently more easily traversable, led to the first plateau.

The soil was covered in numerous mounds, clearly convulsed by plutonic forces. Here and there, erratic boulders, numerous fragments of basalt, pumice, and obsidian. In isolated clumps rose conifers which, a few hundred feet below, at the bottom of the narrow gorges, formed thick masses, almost impenetrable to the sun's rays.

During this first part of the ascent on the lower ramps, Harbert noticed footprints that indicated the recent passage of large animals, big cats or others.

"Those beasts may not willingly give up their domain to us?" said Pencroff.

“Well,” replied the reporter, who had already hunted tigers in India and lions in Africa, “we’ll see about getting rid of them. But in the

meantime, let’s remain vigilant!”

However, the climb was gradual. The route, made longer by detours and obstacles that could not be crossed directly, was long. Sometimes, the ground suddenly dropped away, and one found oneself on the edge of deep crevasses that had to be bypassed. Retracing one's steps in this way, in order to follow some passable path, was time wasted and fatigue endured. At noon, when the small group stopped for lunch at the foot of a large clump of fir trees, near a small stream that cascaded down, they were still halfway to the first plateau, which, from then on, would probably not be reached until nightfall. From this point, the sea horizon opened up more broadly; but, to the right, the eye, stopped by the sharp promontory to the southeast, could not determine whether the coast joined, by an abrupt turn, some land in the background. To the left, the field of vision extended several miles to the north; However, from the northwest, at the point occupied by the explorers, it was abruptly cut off by the edge of a strangely hewn buttress, which formed the powerful abutment of the central cone. Therefore, nothing could yet be discerned of the question Cyrus Smith intended to solve.

At one o'clock, the ascent resumed. It was necessary to veer southwest and enter some fairly dense undergrowth once more. There, beneath the canopy of the trees, several pairs of gallinaceous birds of

the pheasant family fluttered about. They were tragopans, adorned with a fleshy dewlap that hung over their throats, and two thin, cylindrical horns set behind their eyes. Among these pairs, about the size of a rooster, the female was uniformly brown, while the male shone brightly in his red plumage, speckled with small white tears.

Gideon Spilett, with a stone, skillfully and vigorously thrown, killed one of those tragopans, which Pencroff, hungry from the open air, did not look at without some covetousness.

After leaving the thicket, the climbers, giving each other a leg up, ascended a very steep embankment for a hundred feet and reached a higher, sparsely wooded area where the ground had a volcanic appearance. The task then was to return eastward, following switchbacks that made the slopes more manageable, for they were then very steep, and each climber had to carefully choose where to place their foot. Nab and Harbert led the way, Pencroff the rear; between them were Cyrus and the reporter. The animals that frequented these heights—and there were plenty of tracks—must necessarily have belonged to those sure-footed, supple-backed breeds of chamois or isards. A few were seen, but that wasn't the name Pencroff gave them, for at a certain point:

"Sheep!" he cried.

They had all stopped fifty paces from half a dozen large animals, with strong horns curved backwards and flattened towards the tip, with woolly fleece hidden under long silky tawny hairs.

These were not ordinary sheep, but a species commonly found in the mountainous regions of temperate zones, which Harbert named mouflon.

"Do they have legs of lamb and chops?" asked the sailor.

— Yes, replied Harbert.

"Well, they're sheep!" said Pencroff.

These animals, motionless among the basalt debris, stared in astonishment, as if they were seeing human bipeds for the first time. Then, their fear suddenly awakened, they disappeared, leaping across the rocks.

"Goodbye!" Pencroff shouted to them in such a comical tone that Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Harbert and Nab could not help but laugh.

The ascent continued. Traces of lava, very capriciously striated, could frequently be observed on certain slopes. Small fumaroles sometimes cut across the route taken by the climbers, and it was necessary to extend their edges. In a few places, sulfur had been deposited in the form of crystalline concretions, amidst the materials that generally

precede lava flows: pozzolana with irregular, highly roasted grains, and whitish ash made up of countless small feldspathic crystals. As we approached the first plateau, formed by the truncation of the lower cone, the difficulties of the climb became very pronounced. Around four o'clock, we had passed the outermost tree line. Here and there, only a few gnarled, skeletal pines remained, which must have had a hard life to withstand the strong offshore winds at that altitude.

Fortunately for the engineer and his companions, the weather was fine and the atmosphere calm, for a violent breeze at an altitude of three thousand feet would have hampered their maneuvers. The purity of the zenith sky was palpable through the transparency of the air. Perfect calm reigned around them. They could no longer see the sun, now hidden by the vast screen of the upper cone, which obscured the western half-horizon, and whose enormous shadow, stretching to the coast, grew longer as the radiant orb descended in its daily course. A few wisps of vapor, more like mists than clouds, were beginning to appear in the east, taking on all the spectral colors under the action of the sun's rays.

Only five hundred feet separated the explorers from the plateau they intended to reach, where they planned to establish a camp for the night, but this distance increased by more than two miles due to the zigzags

they had to navigate. The ground, so to speak, gave way beneath their feet. The slopes often presented such a wide angle that they slipped on the lava flows when the striations, worn smooth by the air, did not offer sufficient footholds. Finally, evening gradually fell, and it was almost night when Cyrus Smith and his companions, exhausted by a seven-hour ascent, reached the plateau of the first cone.

The discussion then turned to setting up camp and resting, first by eating supper, then by sleeping. This second tier of the mountain rose on a rocky base, among which a hiding place was easily found. Fuel was scarce. However, a fire could be made using the mosses and dry brush that bristled across certain parts of the plateau. While the sailor prepared his fire on stones he had arranged for this purpose, Nab and Harbert took care of supplying him with fuel.

They soon returned with their load of brushwood.

The flint was struck, the burning cloth collected the sparks from the flint, and, under Nab's breath, a crackling fire developed in a few moments, sheltered by the rocks.

This fire was intended only to combat the rather chilly night temperature, and it wasn't used to cook the pheasant, which Nab was saving for the next day. The remains of the capybara and a few dozen

pine nuts made up the supper. It wasn't yet 6:30 when everything was finished.

Cyrus Smith then conceived the idea of exploring, in the semi-darkness, the broad circular platform that supported the upper cone of the mountain. Before resting, he wanted to know if the cone could be rotated at its base, in case its steep sides rendered it inaccessible all the way to the summit. This question greatly concerned him, for it was possible that the plateau might be impassable on the side toward which the cone sloped, that is, to the north. If the mountain's summit could not be reached, and if the base of the cone could not be circumvented, it would be impossible to examine the western portion of the region, and the purpose of the ascent would be partially thwarted.

So, the engineer, disregarding his fatigue, leaving Pencroff and Nab to organize the sleeping arrangements, and Gideon Spilett to note the day's incidents, began to follow the circular edge of the plateau, heading north. Harbert accompanied him.

The night was beautiful and still, the darkness still light. Cyrus Smith and the young boy walked side by side, without speaking. In some places, the plateau opened wide before them, and they passed without difficulty. In others, obstructed by scree, it offered only a narrow path, on which two people could not walk abreast. There were even times

when, after walking for twenty minutes, Cyrus Smith and Harbert had to stop. From this point on, the slopes of the two cones became exposed. No longer was there a shoulder separating the two parts of the mountain. Circumnavigating it on slopes inclined at nearly seventy degrees became impossible.

But while the engineer and the young boy had to abandon their attempt to follow a circular route, they were then given the opportunity to resume their ascent of the cone directly. Indeed, a deep gash in the massif lay before them. This was the mouth of the upper crater, the neck, so to speak, through which the liquid eruptive material had escaped when the volcano was still active. The hardened lava and encrusted scoria formed a kind of natural staircase, with broad steps, which must have facilitated access to the mountain's summit. A single glance was enough for Cyrus Smith to recognize this feature, and without hesitation, followed by the young boy, he entered the enormous crevasse, amidst the growing darkness.

It was still a thousand feet high to climb.

Would the crater's interior slopes be passable? We would soon see. The engineer would continue his ascent as long as he wasn't stopped. Fortunately, these slopes, very long and winding, described a wide spiral inside the volcano, making it easy to climb.

As for the volcano itself, there could be no doubt that it was completely extinct. Not a wisp of smoke rose from its flanks. Not a flame could be seen in its deep cavities. Not a rumble, not a murmur, not a tremor emanated from that dark well, which perhaps extended to the very bowels of the earth. The atmosphere itself, within the crater, was devoid of any sulfurous vapors. It was more than a volcano's sleep; it was its complete extinction.

Cyrus Smith's attempt was to succeed. Little by little, as he and Harbert climbed the inner walls, they saw the crater widen above their heads. The radius of this circular portion of the sky, framed by the cone's edges, increased noticeably. With every step, so to speak, that Cyrus Smith and Harbert took, new stars entered their field of vision. The magnificent constellations of this southern sky shone brightly. At the zenith, the splendid Antares in Scorpius shone with pure brilliance, and, not far away, B in Centaurus, believed to be the closest star to Earth. Then, as the crater widened, Fomalhaut in Pisces, the Southern Triangle, appeared, and finally, almost at the Antarctic pole of the world, the sparkling Southern Cross, which replaces Polaris in the northern hemisphere.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Cyrus Smith and Harbert set foot on the upper ridge of the mountain, at the top of the cone.

The darkness was complete then, preventing the eye from seeing beyond a two-mile radius. Did the sea surround this unknown land, or was it connected, to the west, to some continent in the Pacific? It was still impossible to determine. To the west, a clearly defined band of clouds on the horizon increased the darkness, and the eye could not discern whether the sky and the water merged there along a single circular line.

But, at one point on this horizon, a faint glimmer suddenly appeared, which descended slowly as the cloud rose towards the zenith.

It was the thin crescent of the moon, already close to disappearing. But its light was enough to clearly trace the horizontal line, then detached from the cloud, and the engineer was able to see its trembling image reflected for an instant on a liquid surface.

Cyrus Smith took the young boy's hand, and, in a deep voice:

"An island!" he said, just as the crescent moon was disappearing into the waves.

CHAPTER XI

Half an hour later, Cyrus Smith and Harbert were back at camp. The engineer simply told his companions that the land on which chance had cast them was an island, and that they would decide what to do the next

day. Then, each man made his own way to sleep, and in that basalt hole, at a height of 2,500 feet above sea level, on a peaceful night, the "islanders" enjoyed a deep rest.

The next day, March 30th, after a simple lunch, the roasted tragopan having been the main meal, the engineer decided to climb back to the summit of the volcano to carefully observe the island where he and his people were imprisoned for life—perhaps, if the island was located far from any land, or if it lay not on the route of ships visiting the archipelagos of the Pacific Ocean. This time, his companions accompanied him on this new exploration. They, too, wanted to see this island from which they would request provision for all their needs.

It must have been about seven in the morning when Cyrus Smith, Harbert, Pencroff, Gideon Spilett, and Nab left the camp. None of them seemed worried about their situation. They had faith in themselves, no doubt, but it should be noted that the basis of this faith was not the same for Cyrus Smith as for his companions.

The engineer was confident because he felt capable of wresting from this wild landscape everything necessary for the lives of his companions and himself, and they feared nothing precisely because Cyrus Smith was with them. This distinction will be understood. Pencroff, especially since the incident with the rekindled fire, would not

have despaired for a moment, even if he had found himself on a bare rock, if the engineer had been with him on that rock.

"Bah!" he said, "we left Richmond without the authorities' permission! It would be a miracle if we didn't eventually manage to leave a place where no one would stop us!"

Cyrus Smith followed the same path as the day before. They went around the cone by the plateau that formed a shoulder, until they reached the mouth of the enormous crevasse.

The weather was magnificent. The sun rose in a clear sky and covered the entire eastern slope of the mountain with its rays.

The crater was approached. It was indeed as the engineer had recognized it in the shadows, that is to say, a vast funnel that widened to a height of a thousand feet above the plateau. At the bottom of the crevasse, wide and thick lava flows snaked down the flanks of the mountain and thus marked the route of eruptive material to the lower valleys that crisscrossed the northern part of the island.

The interior of the crater, whose inclination did not exceed thirty-five to forty degrees, presented neither difficulties nor obstacles to the ascent.

Traces of very old lava flows could be seen, which probably flowed out of the top of the cone before this lateral crevasse opened a new

channel for them.

As for the volcanic vent that connected the underground layers to the crater, its depth could not be estimated visually, as it disappeared into the darkness. But the complete extinction of the volcano was beyond doubt.

Before eight o'clock, Cyrus Smith and his companions were gathered at the summit of the crater, on a conical swelling that bulged its northern rim.

"The sea! The sea everywhere!" they cried, as if their lips could not hold back this word that made them islanders.

The sea, indeed, the immense circular sheet of water around them! Perhaps, as he climbed back to the summit of the cone, Cyrus Smith had hoped to discover some coastline, some nearby island, that he hadn't been able to glimpse the previous evening in the darkness. But nothing appeared as far as the horizon, that is, within a radius of more than fifty miles. No land in sight. Not a sail. All this immensity was deserted, and the island occupied the center of a circle that seemed infinite.

The engineer and his companions, silent and motionless, scanned every point of the ocean for several minutes. Their eyes searched the ocean to its furthest reaches. But Pencroff, who possessed such marvelous powers of vision, saw nothing, and certainly, if land had

risen on the horizon, even if it had appeared only as an elusive wisp of vapor, the sailor would undoubtedly have recognized it, for nature had fixed two veritable telescopes beneath his brow! From the ocean, their gaze returned to the island they overlooked, and the first question posed was by Gideon Spilett: "How large can this island be?"

Truly, it did not seem considerable in the middle of that immense ocean.

Cyrus Smith thought for a few moments; he carefully observed the perimeter of the island, taking into account the height at which he was situated; then:

"My friends," he said, "I do not believe I am mistaken in giving the island's coastline a development of more than one hundred miles.

— And consequently, its surface area?...

"It's difficult to appreciate," replied the engineer, "because it's too capriciously cut."

If Cyrus Smith was correct in his assessment, the island was roughly the size of Malta or Zakynthos in the Mediterranean; but it was also much more irregular and less rich in capes, promontories, points, bays, coves, or inlets. Its truly strange shape surprised the eye, and when Gideon Spilett, on the engineer's advice, had drawn its outline, it was

found to resemble some fantastic animal, a kind of monstrous pteropod, that had been asleep on the surface of the Pacific.

Here, indeed, is the exact configuration of this island, which it is important to make known, and whose map was immediately drawn up by the reporter with sufficient precision.

The eastern portion of the coastline, that is, the part where the shipwrecked men had landed, was deeply indented and bordered a vast bay ending to the southeast in a sharp cape, which a point had concealed from Pencroff during his first exploration. To the northeast, two other capes closed off the bay, and between them lay a narrow gulf that resembled the half-open jaw of some formidable shark.

From northeast to northwest, the coastline curved like the flattened skull of a wild animal, before rising again to form a kind of hump that did not assign a very defined shape to this part of the island, the center of which was occupied by the volcanic mountain. From this point, the coastline ran fairly regularly north and south, indented, two-thirds of the way along its perimeter, by a narrow cove, from which it ended in a long tail, resembling the caudal appendage of a gigantic alligator.

This tail formed a veritable peninsula which extended more than thirty miles into the sea, from the southeastern cape of the island, already mentioned, and it rounded off, describing a wide-open

roadstead, which was outlined by the lower coastline of this strangely cut-out land.

At its narrowest point, that is, between the Chimneys and the cove observed on the west coast which corresponded to it in latitude, the island measured only ten miles; but its greatest length, from the northeastern jaw to the tip of the southwestern tail, was no less than thirty miles.

As for the island's interior, its general appearance was as follows: heavily wooded throughout its southern portion, from the mountains to the coast, it was arid and sandy in its northern part. Between the volcano and the east coast, Cyrus Smith and his companions were quite surprised to see a lake, framed by its border of green trees, whose existence they had not suspected. Seen from this height, the lake appeared to be at the same level as the sea, but, upon reflection, the engineer explained to his companions that the altitude of this small body of water must be three hundred feet, since the plateau that served as its basin was simply an extension of the coastal plateau.

"So it's a freshwater lake?" asked Pencroff.

"Necessarily," replied the engineer, "because it must be supplied by the waters flowing from the mountain."

"I can see a small river flowing into it," said Harbert, pointing to a narrow stream whose source must have flowed into the western foothills.

“Indeed,” replied Cyrus Smith, “and since this stream feeds the lake, it is likely that on the seaward side there is a spillway through which the excess water escapes. We shall see this upon our return.”

This small, rather meandering stream, and the river already identified, constituted the hydrographic system, at least as it appeared to the explorers. However, it was possible that, beneath the dense forests that covered two-thirds of the island, other rivers flowed towards the sea. This was even to be expected, given how fertile and rich this region was, boasting some of the most magnificent specimens of temperate flora. As for the northern part, there was no sign of running water; perhaps stagnant water in the marshy northeastern section, but that was all; in short, dunes, sand, and a pronounced aridity that contrasted sharply with the richness of the soil across most of its territory.

The volcano did not occupy the central part of the island. On the contrary, it rose in the northwest region and seemed to mark the boundary between the two zones. To the southwest, south, and southeast, the lower tiers of the foothills disappeared beneath masses

of greenery. To the north, however, one could trace their branches, which ended on the sandy plains. It was also on this side that, during the eruptions, the lava flows had carved their path, and a broad causeway of lava extended to the narrow inlet that formed a gulf to the northeast.

Cyrus Smith and his companions remained there for an hour at the mountain's summit. The island unfolded before their eyes like a relief map with its diverse hues: green for the forests, yellow for the sands, blue for the waters. They took it in as a whole, and only the land hidden beneath the immense greenery, the thalweg of the shadowy valleys, and the interior of the narrow gorges carved at the foot of the volcano, escaped their notice.

One serious question remained to be resolved, and it was bound to have a significant impact on the future of the shipwrecked.

Was the island inhabited?

It was the reporter who asked this question, to which it seemed that one could already answer in the negative, after the meticulous examination that had just been made of the various regions of the island.

Nowhere was there any sign of human activity. Not a cluster of huts, not a single isolated cabin, not a fishing weir along the coast. No smoke

rose into the air to betray the presence of man. It is true that a distance of about thirty miles separated the observers from the furthest points, that is to say, from the tail that projected to the southwest, and it would have been difficult, even for Pencroff, to discover any habitation there. Nor could one lift the curtain of greenery that covered three-quarters of the island and see whether or not it sheltered some settlement.

But, generally, the islanders, in these narrow spaces emerging from the Pacific waves, tend to inhabit the coastline, and the coastline appeared to be absolutely deserted.

Until further exploration, it could therefore be assumed that the island was uninhabited.

But was it frequented, at least temporarily, by the natives of the neighboring islands? This question was difficult to answer. No land appeared within a radius of about fifty miles. But fifty miles can easily be crossed, either by Malay praos or by large Polynesian canoes. Everything therefore depended on the island's location, its isolation in the Pacific, or its proximity to the archipelagos.

Would Cyrus Smith be able to determine his latitude and longitude later without instruments? It would be difficult. Therefore, in case of doubt, it was wise to take certain precautions against a possible landing by the neighboring natives.

The exploration of the island was complete, its shape determined, its topography surveyed, its extent calculated, and its hydrography and orography identified. The layout of the forests and plains had been generally mapped out. All that remained was to descend the mountain slopes and explore the soil from the perspective of its mineral, plant, and animal resources.

But, before giving his companions the signal to leave, Cyrus Smith said to them in his calm, deep voice:

“Here, my friends, is the narrow patch of land upon which the hand of the Almighty has cast us. It is here that we shall live, perhaps for a long time. Perhaps, too, unexpected help will come to us, if some ship happens to pass by… I say by chance, for this island is of little importance; it does not even offer a harbor that could serve as a port of call for ships, and it is to be feared that it is situated outside the usual shipping lanes, that is to say, too far south for ships that frequent the Pacific archipelagos, too far north for those that sail to Australia by rounding Cape Horn. I wish to conceal nothing of the situation from you…”

"And you're right, my dear Cyrus," the reporter replied briskly. "You're dealing with men. They trust you, and you can count on them." "Isn't that so, my friends?"

"I will obey you in everything, Mr. Cyrus," said Harbert, who took the engineer's hand.

— My master, always and everywhere! cried Nab.

"As for me," said the sailor, "may I lose my name if I sulk at the task, and if you will, Mr. Smith, we shall make of this island a little America! We shall build cities there, we shall establish railways there, we shall install telegraphs there, and one fine day, when it is well transformed, well laid out, well civilized, we shall go and offer it to the government of the Union! Only, I ask one thing."

"Which one?" replied the reporter.

"It's about no longer seeing ourselves as shipwrecked people, but rather as colonists who came here to colonize!"

Cyrus Smith couldn't help but smile, and the sailor's motion was adopted. Then he thanked his companions, adding that he was counting on their energy and divine intervention.

"Well then! Let's go to the Chimneys!" cried Pencroff.

— Just a moment, my friends, replied the engineer, it seems good to me to give a name to this island, as well as to the capes, the promontories, the waterways that we have before our eyes.

"Very good," said the reporter. "This will simplify the instructions we may have to give or follow in the future."

"Indeed," the sailor continued, "it's already something to be able to say where you're going and where you've come from. At least you look like you're somewhere."

"Chimneys, for example," said Harbert.

"Exactly!" replied Pencroff. "That name was already more convenient, and it came to me quite naturally. Shall we keep the name 'Chimneys' for our first encampment, Mr. Cyrus?"

— Yes, Pencroff, since you named it that.

"Well, as for the others, that will be easy," continued the sailor, who was in high spirits. "Let's give them names like the Robinsons whose story Harbert read to me more than once: 'Providence Bay,' 'Sperm Whale Point,' 'Cape of Deceived Hope'!"

“Or rather the names of Ms. Smith,” replied Herbert, “of Ms. Spilett, of Nab!...

"My name!" cried Nab, showing off his gleaming white teeth.

"Why not?" replied Pencroff. "Port Nab would be perfect! And Cape Gideon..."

"I would prefer names borrowed from our country," replied the reporter, "and which would remind us of America."

“Yes, for the principal ones,” said Cyrus Smith, “for those of the bays or the seas, I readily agree. Let us name this vast eastern bay Union Bay, for example, this broad southern inlet Washington Bay, the mountain that bears us at this moment Mount Franklin, this lake that stretches before us Grant Lake—nothing could be better, my friends. These names will remind us of our country and of the great citizens who have honored it; but for the rivers, the gulfs, the capes, the headlands, which we see from the top of this mountain, let us choose names that better reflect their particular shape. They will be more firmly imprinted in our minds and will be more practical at the same time. The shape of the island is unusual enough that we should not be at a loss for names that will stand out.” As for the streams we don't know, the various parts of the forest we'll explore later, and the creeks we'll discover, we'll name them as we encounter them. What do you think, my friends?

The engineer's proposal was unanimously accepted by his companions. The island lay before them like an unfurled map, and all that was needed was a name for each of its inward and outward angles, as well as for each of its landforms. Gideon Spilett would inscribe them

as they went along, and the island's geographical nomenclature would be definitively adopted.

First, the two bays and the mountain were named Union Bay, Washington Bay and Mount Franklin, as the engineer had done.

"Now," said the reporter, "I propose to name this peninsula which juts out to the southwest of the island the Serpentine Peninsula, and the curved tail which ends it the Reptile End, for it truly is a reptile's tail.

"Adopted," said the engineer.

— Now, said Harbert, this other end of the island, this gulf which so singularly resembles an open jaw, let us call it Shark-gulf.

— Well found! exclaimed Pencroff, and we will complete the image by naming the two parts of the jaw cape Mandible (Mandible-cape).

"But there are two capes," the reporter observed.

— Well! replied Pencroff, we will have Cape Mandible-North and Cape Mandible-South.

"They are registered," replied Gideon Spilett.

"It remains to name the point at the southeastern end of the island," said Pencroff.

"That is to say, the end of Union Bay?" replied Harbert.

"Claw-cape," cried Nab immediately, who also wanted to be the godfather of some piece of his domain.

And, in truth, Nab had found an excellent name, for this cape well represented the powerful claw of the fantastic animal that this singularly designed island depicted.

Pencroff was delighted with the way things were turning out, and imaginations, somewhat overexcited, soon produced:

To the river that supplied drinking water to the colonists, and near which the balloon had dropped them, the name of the Mercy, — a true thanks to Providence; to the islet on which the shipwrecked had first set foot, the name of the Îlot du Salut (Safety Island); to the plateau that crowned the high granite wall, above the Chimneys, and from where the eye could embrace the whole vast bay, the name of the Plateau de Grande-vue; finally to all that mass of impenetrable woods that covered the Serpentine Peninsula, the name of the forests of the Far West.

The nomenclature of the visible and known parts of the island was thus completed, and, later, it would be completed as new discoveries were made.

As for the island's orientation, the engineer had determined it approximately by the altitude and position of the sun, which placed Union Bay and the entire Grande-vue plateau to the east. But the next

day, by taking the exact time of sunrise and sunset, and noting its position at the half-time elapsed between these sunrise and sunset, he intended to pinpoint the exact north of the island, because, due to its location in the southern hemisphere, the sun, at the precise moment of its culmination, passed to the north, and not to the south, as, in its apparent movement, it seems to do for places located in the northern hemisphere.

Everything was over, and the colonists only had to descend Mount Franklin to return to the Chimneys, when Pencroff exclaimed:

"Well! We are famous scatterbrains!"

"Why is that?" asked Gideon Spilett, who had closed his notebook and was getting up to leave.

"And our island? What! We forgot to name it?"

Harbert was about to suggest naming it after the engineer, and all his companions would have applauded, when Cyrus Smith simply said:

"Let us call it after a great citizen, my friends, the one who is now fighting to defend the unity of the American republic! Let us call it Lincoln Island!"

Three hurrahs were the response to the engineer's proposal.

And that night, before falling asleep, the new settlers talked of their absent country; they spoke of the terrible war that was bleeding it dry; they could not doubt that the South would soon be subdued, and that the cause of the North, the cause of justice, would triumph, thanks to Grant, thanks to Lincoln!

However, this took place on March 30, 1865, and they hardly knew that, sixteen days later, a terrible crime would be committed in Washington, and that, on Good Friday, Abraham Lincoln would fall under the bullet of a fanatic.

CHAPTER XII

The settlers on Lincoln Island took one last look around them, they circled the crater along its narrow rim, and, half an hour later, they were back down on the first plateau, at their night camp.

Pencroff thought it was lunchtime, and, in connection with this, there was talk of setting the two watches of Cyrus Smith and the reporter.

We know that Gideon Spilett's chronometer had been spared by the seawater, since the reporter had initially been thrown onto the sand, out of reach of the waves. It was an instrument set up in excellent conditions, a veritable pocket chronometer, which Gideon Spilett had never forgotten to wind carefully every day.

As for the engineer's watch, it must have stopped during the time Cyrus Smith had spent in the dunes.

The engineer therefore wound it up, and, estimating approximately by the height of the sun that it must be about nine o'clock in the morning, he set his watch to that time.

Gideon Spilett was about to imitate him, when the engineer stopped him with his hand and said:

"No, my dear Spilett, wait. You have kept the Richmond time, haven't you?"

— Yes, Cyrus.

— Therefore, your watch is set to the meridian of this city, which is roughly the same as that of Washington?

— Probably.

— Well, leave it as it is. Just wind it up very precisely, but don't touch the hands. That might come in handy.

"What's the point?" thought the sailor.

They ate so well that their supply of game and almonds was completely exhausted. But Pencroff wasn't worried at all. They would resupply along the way. Top, whose portion had been quite meager, would surely find some more game under the cover of the thickets. Besides, the sailor was thinking of simply asking the engineer to make some gunpowder and one or two shotguns, and he thought this would present no difficulty. Leaving the plateau, Cyrus Smith suggested to his companions that they take a new route back to the Chimneys. He wanted to see Grant Lake, so magnificently framed by its border of trees. So they followed the crest of one of the foothills, between which the creek that fed it probably had its source. When they talked, the colonists were already using only the proper names they had just chosen, and this greatly facilitated the exchange of their ideas. Harbert and Pencroff — one young and the other a bit of a child — were delighted, and, as they walked, the sailor said:

"Hey! Harbert! How's it going! We can't possibly get lost, my boy, since whether we follow the road to Grant Lake or join the Mercy through the Far West woods, we'll inevitably arrive at the Grande-vue plateau, and consequently, at Union Bay!"

It had been agreed that, without forming a tight group, the colonists would not stray too far from one another. Certainly, some dangerous animals inhabited the island's dense forests, and it was wise to remain vigilant. Generally, Pencroff, Harbert, and Nab walked in the lead, preceded by Top, who searched every nook and cranny. The reporter and the engineer walked alongside, Gideon Spilett ready to note any incident, the engineer mostly silent, only leaving his path to pick up some mineral or vegetable substance, which he put in his pocket without a second thought.

"What on earth is he picking up like that?" muttered Pencroff. "I've looked everywhere, but I can't see anything worth bending down for!"

Around ten o'clock, the small group descended the last slopes of Mount Franklin. The ground was still dotted only with bushes and a few scattered trees. They walked on yellowish, scorched earth, forming a plain about a mile long, which preceded the edge of the woods. Large blocks of the basalt that, according to Bischof's experiments, took 350 million years to cool, littered the plain, which was very rugged in

places. However, there was no trace of the lava flows that had erupted primarily down the northern slopes.

Cyrus Smith therefore believed he would reach the creek without incident, which, according to him, should run under the trees, at the edge of the plain, when he saw Harbert rushing back, while Nab and the sailor hid behind the rocks.

"What is it, my boy?" asked Gideon Spilett.

"Smoke," replied Harbert. "We saw smoke rising between the rocks, a hundred paces from us."

"Men in this place?" exclaimed the reporter.

"Let's avoid showing ourselves before we know who we're dealing with," replied Cyrus Smith. "I fear the natives, if there are any on this island, rather than desire them. Where is Top?"

— Top is in front.

— And he doesn't bark?

- No.

"That's odd. Nevertheless, let's try to remember it."

In a few moments, the engineer, Gideon Spilett, and Harbert had rejoined their two companions, and, like them, they disappeared

behind some basalt debris. From there, they clearly saw smoke swirling as it rose into the air, smoke whose yellowish color was very distinctive.

Top, summoned by a light whistle from his master, returned, and the latter, signaling to his companions to wait for him, slipped between the rocks.

The colonists, motionless, awaited the results of this exploration with some anxiety, when a call from Cyrus Smith brought them running. They joined him immediately, and were first struck by the unpleasant odor that permeated the air.

This easily recognizable smell was enough for the engineer to guess what this smoke was, which at first must have worried him, and not without reason.

"This fire," he said, "or rather this smoke, is nature alone bearing the brunt of it. It is merely a sulfurous source, which will allow us to effectively treat our laryngitis."

"Good!" cried Pencroff. "What a pity I don't have a cold!"

The colonists then headed towards the place from which the smoke was escaping. There, they saw a sodium sulfide spring, which flowed quite abundantly between the rocks, and whose waters gave off a strong smell of hydrogen sulfide, after having absorbed oxygen from the air.

Cyrus Smith, dipping his hand in, found the waters smooth to the touch. He tasted them and acknowledged that their flavor was somewhat sweet. As for their temperature, he estimated it at ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius above zero). And Harbert, having asked him on what basis he made this assessment:

"Quite simply, my child," he said, "because, when I put my hand in this water, I felt neither hot nor cold. Therefore, it is at the same temperature as the human body, which is about ninety-five degrees."

Then, the sulfur spring offering no current use, the settlers headed towards the thick edge of the forest, which developed a few hundred paces away.

There, as had been presumed, the stream flowed its clear, bright waters between high banks of red earth, whose color revealed the presence of iron oxide. This color immediately led to the stream being named Red Creek.

It was merely a wide, deep, and clear stream, fed by mountain waters, which, half river, half torrent, sometimes flowing peacefully over sand, sometimes roaring over rocky outcrops or cascading down, ran for a length of a mile and a half and a width varying from thirty to forty feet toward the lake. Its waters were fresh, which led one to assume that the

lake's waters were also fresh. A fortunate circumstance, in case a more suitable dwelling than the Chimneys were found on its shores.

As for the trees that, a few hundred feet downstream, shaded the banks of the creek, they mostly belonged to the species that abound in the temperate zone of Australia or Tasmania, and no longer to those conifers that bristled on the portion of the island already explored a few miles from the Grande-vue plateau. At this time of year, at the beginning of April, which in this hemisphere represents October, that is to say, at the beginning of autumn, they were not yet lacking in foliage. They were particularly casuarinas and eucalyptus, some of which would provide next spring a sweet bounty quite similar to the manna of the Orient. Clumps of Australian cedars also rose in the clearings, covered with that tall grass called "tussac" in New Holland; but the coconut tree, so abundant on the Pacific archipelagos, seemed to be lacking on the island, whose latitude was probably too low.

"What a misfortune!" said Harbert, "such a useful tree, and with such beautiful nuts!"

As for the birds, they swarmed among the somewhat sparse branches of the eucalyptus and casuarina trees, which did not hinder the spreading of their wings. Black, white or grey cockatoos, parrots and parakeets, with plumage nuanced in all colours, "kings", a brilliant

green and crowned with red, blue lorises, "blue-mountains", seemed to be seen only through a prism, and fluttered about amidst a deafening cackle.

Suddenly, a strange concert of discordant voices resounded from the middle of a thicket. The colonists heard, in succession, birdsong, the cries of four-legged animals, and a kind of clapping sound they might have thought came from the lips of a native. Nab and Harbert had rushed toward the bush, forgetting the most basic principles of caution. Fortunately, there was neither a fearsome beast nor a dangerous native there, but simply half a dozen of those mocking, songbirds, which they recognized as "mountain pheasants." A few skillfully delivered blows with a stick ended the mimicry, providing excellent game for dinner that evening.

Harbert also reported magnificent pigeons with bronze wings, some topped with a superb crest, others draped in green, like their counterparts at Port Macquarie; but it proved impossible to reach them, nor the crows and magpies, which fled in flocks. A shot from a shotgun with small shot would have slaughtered these birds, but the hunters were still limited, as projectile weapons, to stones, and as polearms, to sticks, and these primitive weapons were still quite inadequate.

Their inadequacy was demonstrated even more clearly when a troop of quadrupeds, hopping, leaping, making jumps of thirty feet, veritable flying mammals, fled over the thickets, so swiftly and at such heights, that one might have thought they were passing from tree to tree, like squirrels.

"Kangaroos!" cried Harbert.

"And is that edible?" replied Pencroff.

"Stewed," replied the reporter, "it's worth the best venison!"

Gideon Spilett hadn't finished this exciting sentence when the sailor, followed by Nab and Harbert, set off in pursuit of the kangaroos. Cyrus Smith called them back, but in vain. It was bound to be in vain, too, that the hunters would chase this springy game, which bounced like a ball. After five minutes of running, they were out of breath, and the group disappeared into the undergrowth.

Top had not been any more successful than his masters.

"Mr. Cyrus," said Pencroff, when the engineer and the reporter had joined him, "Mr. Cyrus, you can see that it is essential to manufacture rifles. Will this be possible?"

"Perhaps," replied the engineer, "but we shall begin by making bows and arrows, and I have no doubt that you will become as adept at

handling them as Australian hunters."

"Arrows, bows!" said Pencroff with a disdainful pout. "That's for children!"

"Don't be so proud, my friend Pencroff," replied the reporter. "Bows and arrows were enough, for centuries, to stain the world with blood. Gunpowder is only yesterday, and war is as old as the human race—unfortunately!"

“That’s certainly true, Mr. Spilett,” replied the sailor, “and I always speak too quickly. You must excuse me!”

However, Harbert, engrossed in his favorite subject, natural history, returned to the topic of kangaroos, saying:

"Besides, we were dealing with the most difficult species to capture. They were giants with long grey fur; but, if I'm not mistaken, there are black and red kangaroos, rock kangaroos, rat kangaroos, which are easier to catch. There are about a dozen species..."

"Harbert," replied the sailor sententiously, "for me there is only one kind of kangaroo, the 'spit-roasted kangaroo,' and that is precisely the one we will be missing tonight!"

We couldn't help but laugh at Master Pencroff's new classification. The brave sailor didn't hide his regret at being reduced to singing

pheasants for dinner; but fortune was once again to be kind to him. Indeed, Top, well aware that his interests were at stake, went prowling everywhere with an instinct coupled with a ferocious appetite. It was even likely that if any game fell into his hands, there would be little left for the hunters, and that Top was then hunting for his own benefit; but Nab was keeping a close eye on him, and rightly so.

Around three o'clock, the dog disappeared into the undergrowth, and muffled growls soon indicated that it was struggling with some animal.

Nab lunged forward, and indeed, he spotted Top greedily devouring a quadruped, which, ten seconds later, would have been impossible to identify in Top's stomach. But, very fortunately, the dog had stumbled upon a nest; he had made a triple kill, and two other rodents—the animals in question belonged to that order—lay strangled on the ground.

Nab reappeared triumphantly, holding in each hand one of these rodents, which were larger than a hare. Their yellow fur was mixed with greenish spots, and their tails were only rudimentary. Citizens of the Union could not hesitate to give these rodents the name that suited them.

They were "maras", a type of agouti, a little larger than their counterparts in tropical regions, true American rabbits, with long ears,

with jaws armed on each side with five molars, which is precisely what distinguishes them from agoutis.

"Hurrah!" cried Pencroff. "The roast has arrived! And now we can go home!"

The walk, briefly interrupted, was resumed. Red Creek still rolled its clear waters beneath the canopy of casuarinas, banksias, and gigantic gum trees. Magnificent lilies rose to a height of twenty feet.

Other tree species, unknown to the young naturalist, leaned over the stream, which could be heard murmuring beneath these green bowers.

However, the stream was widening considerably, and Cyrus Smith was inclined to believe that he would soon reach its mouth. Indeed, emerging from a thick stand of beautiful trees, it suddenly appeared.

The explorers had arrived at the western shore of Grant Lake. The place was worth seeing. This body of water, about seven miles in circumference and covering two hundred and fifty acres, lay within a border of varied trees. To the east, through a curtain of greenery picturesquely turned up in places, appeared a sparkling sea horizon. To the north, the lake traced a slightly concave curve, which contrasted with the sharp point of its lower end. Numerous waterfowl frequented the shores of this little Ontario, whose "thousand islands" of its American namesake were represented by a rock that emerged from its

surface a few hundred feet from the southern shore. There, several pairs of kingfishers lived together, perched on some rock, solemn and motionless, watching for passing fish, then darting out, plunging with a sharp cry, and reappearing, the prey in its beak. Elsewhere, on the banks and on the islet, strutting about were wild ducks, pelicans, moorhens, red-billed ducks, philedons, equipped with a tongue shaped like a brush, and one or two specimens of those splendid little birds, whose tails grow like the graceful uprights of a lyre.

As for the waters of the lake, they were soft, clear, a little black, and from certain bubblings, from the concentric circles that crisscrossed on their surface, one could not doubt that they were very full of fish.

“This lake is truly beautiful!” said Gideon Spilett. “One could live on its shores!”

"We'll live there!" replied Cyrus Smith.

The settlers, wishing to return to the Chimneys by the shortest route, descended to the southern angle formed by the junction of the lake's shores. They made their way, not without difficulty, through the thickets and brambles, which no human hand had ever cleared, and thus headed towards the shoreline, arriving north of the Grande-vue plateau. Two miles were covered in this direction, and then, beyond the

last line of trees, the plateau appeared, carpeted with thick grass, and beyond, the endless sea.

To return to the chimneys, it was enough to cross the plateau obliquely for a mile and descend to the bend formed by the first bend of the Mercy River. But the engineer wanted to determine how and where the lake's overflow escaped, and the exploration was extended under the trees for a mile and a half to the north. It was probable, in fact, that an outlet existed somewhere, and undoubtedly through a cut in the granite. This lake was, in short, nothing more than an immense basin, which had gradually filled with the flow of the creek, and its overflow must surely drain into the sea through some waterfall. If this was the case, the engineer thought it might be possible to use this waterfall and harness its power, currently wasted and of no use to anyone. So they continued to follow the shores of Grant Lake, ascending the plateau; but, after traveling another mile in that direction, Cyrus Smith had not been able to discover the spillway, which must nevertheless exist.

It was half past four then. Dinner preparations required the colonists to return to their homes. So the small group retraced their steps, and, along the left bank of the Mercy, Cyrus Smith and his companions arrived at the Chimneys.

There, the fire was lit, and Nab and Pencroff, to whom the functions of cooks were naturally assigned, one in his capacity as a Negro, the other in his capacity as a sailor, quickly prepared grilled agoutis, which were greatly appreciated.

After the meal, just as everyone was about to go to sleep, Cyrus Smith took small samples of different types of minerals from his pocket and simply said:

"My friends, this is iron ore, this is pyrite, this is clay, this is lime, this is coal. This is what nature gives us, and this is her share in the common work! — until tomorrow, ours!"

CHAPTER XIII

"Well, Mr. Cyrus, where shall we begin?" Pencroff asked the engineer the next morning.

"From the beginning," replied Cyrus Smith.

And indeed, it was with the "beginning" that these colonists were going to be forced to start. They didn't even possess the tools necessary to make tools, and they weren't even in the conditions of nature, which, "having time, saves effort." Time was lacking, since they had to immediately provide for the needs of their existence, and if, taking

advantage of acquired experience, they had nothing to invent, at least they had everything to make.

Their iron and steel were still only in the form of ore, their pottery in the form of clay, their linen and clothing in the form of textile materials.

It must be said, moreover, that these colonists were "men" in the truest and most powerful sense of the word. Engineer Smith could not have been assisted by more intelligent companions, nor with greater devotion and zeal. He had interviewed them. He knew their abilities.

Gédéon Spilett, a highly talented reporter who had learned everything he could to be able to talk about anything, was destined to contribute significantly, both intellectually and physically, to the colonization of the island. He would not shy away from any task, and, a passionate hunter, he would turn what, until then, had only been a pleasure into a profession.

Harbert, a brave child, remarkably well-educated already in the natural sciences, was going to provide a serious contribution to the common cause.

Nab was the embodiment of devotion. Skillful, intelligent, tireless, robust, with an iron constitution, he had some knowledge of blacksmithing and could only be very useful to the colony.

As for Pencroff, he had been a sailor on all the oceans, a carpenter in the construction yards of Brooklyn, a tailor's assistant on state buildings, a gardener, a farmer, during his holidays, etc., and like seafarers, he was good at everything, he knew how to do everything.

It would have been truly difficult to assemble five men better suited to fight against fate, more certain of triumphing over it.

“In the beginning,” Cyrus Smith had said. Now, this beginning the engineer was referring to was the construction of a device that could be used to transform natural substances. We know the role that heat plays in these transformations. And the fuel, wood or coal, was immediately usable. The task, therefore, was to build a furnace to use it.

"What will this oven be used for?" asked Pencroff.

"To make the pottery we need," replied Cyrus Smith.

— And what will we use to make the oven?

— With bricks.

— And the bricks?

— With clay. Let's go, my friends. To avoid transportation, we'll set up our workshop right at the production site. Nab will bring provisions, and there will be no shortage of fire for cooking the food.

— No, replied the reporter, but if food becomes scarce due to a lack of hunting equipment!

"Ah! If only we had a knife!" cried the sailor.

"Well?" asked Cyrus Smith.

— Well! I could quickly make a bow and arrows, and game would be plentiful in the pantry!

"Yes, a knife, a sharp blade..." said the engineer, as if he were talking to himself.

At that moment, her gaze fell upon Top, who was walking back and forth on the shore.

Suddenly, Cyrus Smith's gaze lit up.

"Great, here!" he said.

The dog came running at his master's call. The master took Top's head in his hands, and, unfastening the collar the animal wore around its neck, broke it in two, saying, "Here are two knives, Pencroff!" Two cheers from the sailor answered him. Top's collar was made of a thin blade of tempered steel. It was therefore simply a matter of sharpening it first on a sandstone, so as to bring the edge to a sharp point, and then removing the burr on a finer sandstone. Now, this kind of sandy rock was found in abundance on the shore, and, two hours later, the colony's

toolkit consisted of two sharp blades that had easily been fitted into a sturdy handle.

The acquisition of this first tool was hailed as a triumph. A precious conquest indeed, and one that came at just the right time.

They set off. Cyrus Smith's intention was to return to the western shore of the lake, where he had noticed the clay soil the day before, of which he possessed a sample. So they took the Mercy River bank, crossed the Grande-vue plateau, and, after a walk of no more than five miles, arrived at a clearing situated two hundred paces from Grant Lake.

Along the way, Harbert had discovered a tree whose branches the Native Americans of South America used to make their bows. It was the crejimba, a palm tree that does not bear edible fruit. Long, straight branches were cut, stripped of their leaves, and trimmed, making them stronger in the middle and weaker at the tips. All that remained was to find a suitable plant to make the bowstring. This turned out to be a species belonging to the mallow family, a hibiscus heterophyllus, which provided remarkably strong fibers, comparable to animal sinew.

Pencroff thus obtained bows of considerable power, lacking only the arrows. These were easy to make with straight, rigid branches, free of knots, but the point that would arm them—that is, a suitable substance

to replace iron—was not so readily available. But Pencroff reasoned that, having contributed his share of the work, chance would take care of the rest.

The settlers had arrived at the site they had scouted the day before. It consisted of the clay used to make bricks and tiles, a clay, therefore, very suitable for the task at hand. The labor presented no difficulties. It was simply a matter of degreasing the clay with sand, molding the bricks, and firing them over a wood fire.

Ordinarily, bricks are pressed into molds, but the engineer was content to make them by hand. The entire day and the following day were spent on this work. The clay, soaked in water and then worked with the feet and wrists of the workers, was divided into prisms of equal size. A skilled worker can make up to ten thousand bricks in twelve hours without a machine; but in their two days of work, the five brickmakers of Lincoln Island made no more than three thousand, which were stacked close together until they were completely dry enough to be fired, that is, in three or four days.

It was on April 2nd that Cyrus Smith took care of fixing the orientation of the island.

The day before, he had noted the exact time the sun had disappeared below the horizon, taking refraction into account. That morning, he

recorded the time it reappeared with no less precision. Between that sunset and sunrise, twelve hours and twenty-four minutes had elapsed. Therefore, six hours and twelve minutes after its rising, the sun that day would cross the meridian exactly, and the point in the sky it occupied at that moment would be north.

At the appointed time, Cyrus noted this point, and, by placing two trees opposite each other with the sun, which were to serve as his reference points, he thus obtained an invariable meridian for his subsequent operations.

During the two days preceding the brick firing, the focus was on gathering fuel. Branches were cut around the clearing, and all the fallen wood was collected. This was done in conjunction with a little hunting in the surrounding area, especially since Pencroff now possessed several dozen arrows tipped with very sharp points. Top had supplied these points, bringing back a porcupine, rather mediocre game, but undeniably valuable thanks to its quills. These quills were securely fitted to the ends of the arrows, whose direction was ensured by fletching made of cockatoo feathers. The reporter and Harbert quickly became very skilled archers. Consequently, game, both furred and feathered, was plentiful at Cheminées: capybaras, pigeons, agoutis, grouse, and so on. Most of these animals were killed in the part of the

forest located on the left bank of the Mercy, which was named Jacamar Wood, in memory of the bird that Pencroff and Harbert had pursued during their first exploration.

This game was eaten fresh, but the capybara hams were preserved by smoking them over a green wood fire after flavoring them with fragrant leaves. However, this very fortifying food was always served roasted upon roasted, and the guests would have been happy to hear a simple stew simmering in the hearth; but they had to wait until the pot was made, and consequently, until the oven was built.

During these excursions, which were only carried out within a very limited radius around the brickworks, the hunters were able to observe the recent passage of large animals, armed with powerful claws, whose species they could not identify.

Cyrus Smith therefore advised them to exercise extreme caution, as it was likely that the forest contained some dangerous wild animals.

And he was right to do so. Indeed, Gideon Spilett and Harbert one day spotted an animal that resembled a jaguar. Fortunately, this beast did not attack them, for they might not have escaped without some serious injury. But as soon as he had a proper weapon—that is to say, one of those rifles that Pencroff was demanding—Gideon Spilett vowed to

wage a relentless war against the ferocious beasts and rid the island of them.

The Chimneys, during these few days, were not made more comfortable, as the engineer intended to find or build, if necessary, a more suitable dwelling. They simply spread a fresh layer of moss and dry leaves on the sand of the corridors, and on these somewhat primitive cots, the exhausted workers slept soundly.

They also recorded the number of days that had passed on Lincoln Island since the colonists landed there, and a regular count was kept thereafter. On April 5th, which was a Wednesday, it had been twelve days since the wind had cast the shipwrecked people ashore on that coast.

On April 6, at dawn, the engineer and his companions were gathered in the clearing, at the place where the brick firing was to take place.

Naturally, this operation had to be carried out in the open air, not in kilns; or rather, the agglomeration of the bricks would be nothing more than an enormous self-baking kiln. The fuel, made of well-prepared bundles of brushwood, was laid on the ground and surrounded by several rows of dried bricks, which soon formed a large cube, on the outside of which vents were made. This work lasted all day, and only in the evening was the bundles of brushwood set alight.

That night, no one went to bed, and care was taken to ensure that the fire did not slow down.

The operation lasted forty-eight hours and was a complete success. The steaming mass then had to be allowed to cool, and during this time, Nab and Pencroff, guided by Cyrus Smith, hauled several loads of calcium carbonate, a very common stone found in abundance north of the lake, onto a hurdle made of interwoven branches. These stones, decomposed by the heat, yielded a quicklime, very rich and expanding considerably upon slaking, ultimately as pure as if it had been produced by the calcination of chalk or marble. Mixed with sand, which reduces shrinkage as the paste solidifies, this lime provides an excellent mortar. From these various tasks, the result was that, on April 9th, the engineer had at his disposal a certain quantity of ready-made lime and several thousand bricks.

They began, without delay, the construction of a kiln, which was to be used for firing the various types of pottery essential for domestic use. This was accomplished without too much difficulty. Five days later, the kiln was loaded with the coal the engineer had discovered in an open-pit mine near the mouth of Red Creek, and the first plumes of smoke rose from a chimney about twenty feet high. The clearing had been transformed into a factory, and Pencroff was not far from believing that

all the products of modern industry would soon emerge from this kiln. In the meantime, what the settlers first produced was common pottery, but very suitable for cooking food. The raw material was the very clay of the soil, to which Cyrus Smith added a little lime and quartz. In reality, this paste constituted the true "pipe clay", with which pots, cups that had been molded on pebbles of suitable shapes, plates, large jars and vats to contain water, etc. were made.

The shape of these objects was awkward, defective; but, after they had been fired at a high temperature, the kitchen of the Chimneys found itself furnished with a number of utensils as precious as if the finest kaolin had been used in their composition.

It should be mentioned here that Pencroff, wanting to know if this clay, thus prepared, justified its name of "pipe clay", made himself some rather crude pipes, which he found charming, but which lacked tobacco, alas! And, it must be said, it was a great deprivation for Pencroff.

"But tobacco will come, like everything else!" he repeated in his bursts of absolute confidence.

These works lasted until April 15th, and it is understandable that this time was used conscientiously.

The colonists, having become potters, did nothing but make pottery. When it suited Cyrus Smith to change them into blacksmiths, they

would be blacksmiths. But, the next day being a Sunday, and indeed Easter Sunday, they all agreed to sanctify the day by resting. These Americans were religious men, scrupulous observers of the precepts of the Bible, and the situation they found themselves in could only strengthen their feelings of trust in the Author of all things.

On the evening of April 15th, they returned to Les Cheminées for good. The remaining pottery was taken away, and the kiln was put out, awaiting a new purpose. The return was marked by a fortunate incident: the engineer's discovery of a substance suitable for replacing tinder. This spongy, velvety pulp is known to come from a certain fungus of the polypore genus. Properly prepared, it is extremely flammable, especially when it has been previously saturated with gunpowder or boiled in a solution of potassium nitrate or potassium chlorate. But until then, none of these polypores, nor even any of the morels that can replace them, had been found. That day, the engineer, having recognized a certain plant belonging to the genus Artemisia, which includes among its principal species wormwood, lemongrass, tarragon, and gepi, pulled up several clumps and, showing them to the sailor:

"Here, Pencroff," he said, "this will please you."

Pencroff looked closely at the plant, covered in long, silky hairs, whose leaves were covered with a cottony down.

"Well, what is this, Mr. Cyrus?" asked Pencroff. "Good heavens! Is this tobacco?"

"No," replied Cyrus Smith, "it's artemisia, Chinese mugwort for the scientists, and for the rest of us, it will be tinder."

And, indeed, this mugwort, properly dried, provides a very flammable substance, especially when later the engineer had impregnated it with that potassium nitrate of which the island possessed several layers, and which is nothing other than saltpeter.

That evening, all the colonists, gathered in the central room, enjoyed a proper supper. Nab had prepared an agouti stew, a flavored capybara ham, to which were added the boiled tubers of *Caladium macrorhizum*, a type of herbaceous plant in the Araceae family, which, in the tropics, would have taken on a tree-like form. These rhizomes were of excellent taste, very nutritious, somewhat similar to the substance sold in England under the name "Portland sago," and they could, to some extent, replace bread, which the colonists on Lincoln Island still lacked.

Supper finished, before retiring to sleep, Cyrus Smith and his companions went out onto the beach for some fresh air. It was eight

o'clock in the evening. The night promised to be magnificent. The moon, which had been full five days before, had not yet risen, but the horizon was already silvered with those soft, pale hues that one might call moonrise. At the southern zenith, the circumpolar constellations shone brightly, and, among them all, that Southern Cross which the engineer, a few days earlier, had saluted from the summit of Mount Franklin.

Cyrus Smith observed for some time this splendid constellation, which has at its summit and base two first-magnitude stars, on its left arm a second-magnitude star, and on its right arm a third-magnitude star.

Then, after thinking about it:

"Harbert," he asked the young boy, "isn't it April 15th?

"Yes, Mr. Cyrus," replied Harbert.

"Well, if I'm not mistaken, tomorrow will be one of the four days of the year when true time coincides with mean time; that is to say, my child, tomorrow, within a few seconds, the sun will cross the meridian precisely at noon. So, if the weather is fine, I think I'll be able to determine the island's longitude to within a few degrees."

— Without instruments, without a sextant? asked Gideon Spilett.

“Yes,” the engineer continued. “And since the night is clear, I will try this very evening to determine our latitude by calculating the height of the Southern Cross, that is, the South Pole, above the horizon. You understand, my friends, that before undertaking any serious installation work, it is not enough to have determined that this land is an island; one must, as far as possible, ascertain its distance from the American continent, the Australian continent, or the major archipelagos of the Pacific.”

— Indeed, said the reporter, instead of building a house, we may be better off building a boat, if by chance we are only a hundred miles from an inhabited coast.

"That's why," continued Cyrus Smith, "I'm going to try to find the latitude of Lincoln Island this evening, and tomorrow at noon I'll try to calculate its longitude."

If the engineer had possessed a sextant, an instrument that allows for the highly precise measurement of the angular distance of objects by reflection, the operation would have presented no difficulty. That evening, by the altitude of the pole, and the following day, by the sun's transit across the meridian, he would have obtained the island's coordinates. But, lacking the instrument, a substitute was necessary.

Cyrus Smith returned to the Chimneys. By the light of the hearth, he whittled two small, flat rulers and joined them at one end to form a kind of compass whose arms could be opened or closed. The point of attachment was secured with a strong acacia thorn, obtained from the dead wood in the woodpile.

Having completed this instrument, the engineer returned to the shore; but since he needed to determine the altitude of the pole above a clearly defined horizon, that is, a sea horizon, and since Cape Griffe obscured the southern horizon, he had to find a more suitable location. The best would obviously have been the coastline directly facing south, but this would have required crossing the Mercy River, which was then deep, and that presented a difficulty.

Cyrus Smith therefore resolved to go and make his observation on the plateau of Grande-vue, reserving the right to take into account its height above sea level — a height which he intended to calculate the next day by a simple method of elementary geometry.

The settlers therefore moved onto the plateau, going up the left bank of the Mercy, and they came to position themselves on the edge which ran northwest and southeast, that is to say on that line of capriciously cut rocks which bordered the river.

This part of the plateau rose some fifty feet above the heights of the right bank, which descended in a double slope to the tip of Cape Griffe and to the southern coast of the island. Nothing obstructed the view, which encompassed the horizon in a semi-circle, from the cape to Reptile Headland. To the south, this horizon, illuminated from below by the first rays of moonlight, stood out sharply against the sky and could be sighted with some precision.

At that moment, the Southern Cross appeared to the observer in an inverted position, with the star alpha marking its base, which is closer to the southern pole.

This constellation is not located as close to the Antarctic Pole as Polaris is to the Arctic Pole. Alpha Star is about twenty-seven degrees away, but Cyrus Smith knew this and had to take this distance into account in his calculations. He also took care to observe it when it crossed the meridian directly below the pole, which simplified his calculations.

Cyrus Smith therefore directed one arm of his wooden compass at the sea horizon, the other at alpha, as he would have directed telescopes at a repeating circle, and the opening of the two arms gave him the angular distance separating alpha from the horizon. In order to fix the angle obtained immutably, he pinned the two plates of his apparatus to

a third plate placed transversely, using thorns, so that their separation was firmly maintained.

Having done this, all that remained was to calculate the resulting angle, adjusting the observation to sea level to account for the depression of the horizon, which required measuring the height of the plateau. The value of this angle would thus give the height of alpha, and consequently that of the pole above the horizon, that is to say, the latitude of the island, since the latitude of a point on the globe is always equal to the height of the pole above the horizon at that point.

These calculations were postponed until the next day, and by ten o'clock everyone was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

The following day, April 16th—Easter Sunday—the colonists emerged from the Chimneys at daybreak and proceeded to wash their linens and clean their clothes. The engineer planned to manufacture soap as soon as he had obtained the necessary raw materials for saponification: soda or potash, grease or oil. The crucial issue of wardrobe replacement would also be addressed in due course. In any case, the clothes would last at least another six months, as they were sturdy and could withstand the rigors of manual labor. But everything depended on the

island's location relative to the inhabited mainland. This would be determined that very day, weather permitting.

But the sun, rising over a clear horizon, heralded a magnificent day, one of those beautiful autumn days that are like the last farewells of the warm season.

The aim was therefore to supplement the elements of the previous day's observations by measuring the height of the Grande-vue plateau above sea level.

"Don't you need an instrument similar to the one you used yesterday?" Harbert asked the engineer.

"No, my child," he replied, "we will proceed differently, and in a manner almost as precise."

Harbert, eager to learn about everything, followed the engineer, who moved away from the foot of the granite wall, descending to the edge of the beach. Meanwhile, Pencroff, Nab, and the reporter were busy with various tasks.

Cyrus Smith had equipped himself with a sort of straight pole, about twelve feet long, which he had measured as accurately as possible, comparing it to his own height, which he knew to within one line. Harbert carried a plumb line given to him by Cyrus Smith, that is to say, a simple stone fixed to the end of a flexible fiber.

Having arrived about twenty feet from the edge of the beach, and about five hundred feet from the granite wall, which stood perpendicularly, Cyrus Smith drove the pole two feet into the sand, and, by carefully wedging it, he managed, by means of the plumb line, to raise it perpendicular to the plane of the horizon.

Having done this, he moved back the necessary distance so that, lying on the sand, the line of sight from his eye touched both the end of the pole and the crest of the wall.

Then he carefully marked this point with a stake.

Then, addressing Harbert:

"Do you know the first principles of geometry?" he asked him.

"A little, Mr. Cyrus," replied Harbert, who did not want to get ahead of himself.

— Do you remember the properties of two similar triangles?

"Yes," replied Harbert. "Their corresponding sides are proportional."

— Well, my child, I have just constructed two similar triangles, both right-angled: the first, the smaller one, has as sides the perpendicular pole, the distance that separates the stake from the bottom of the pole, and my line of sight as its hypotenuse; the second has as sides the perpendicular wall, whose height we are to measure, the distance that

separates the stake from the bottom of this wall, and my line of sight also forming its hypotenuse, — which happens to be the extension of that of the first triangle.

"Ah! Mr. Cyrus, I understand!" cried Harbert. "Just as the distance from the stake to the pole is proportional to the distance from the stake to the base of the wall, so too is the height of the pole proportional to the height of that wall."

"That's exactly it, Harbert," replied the engineer, "and when we have measured the first two distances, knowing the height of the pole, we will only have a calculation of proportions to make, which will give us the height of the wall and save us the trouble of measuring it directly."

The two horizontal distances were measured using the pole itself, the length of which above the sand was exactly ten feet.

The first distance was fifteen feet between the stake and the point where the pole was driven into the sand.

The second distance, between the stake and the base of the wall, was five hundred feet.

Having completed these measures, Cyrus Smith and the young boy returned to the Chimneys.

There, the engineer took a flat stone that he had brought back from his previous excursions, a kind of slate, on which it was easy to trace numbers using a sharp shell.

He therefore established the following proportion:

15: 500:: 10: x 500 times 10 = 5000 5000 over 15 = 333.33.

From this it was established that the granite wall measured three hundred and thirty-three feet in height.

Cyrus Smith then took up the instrument he had made the day before, the two plates of which, by their spacing, gave him the angular distance of the star Alpha from the horizon. He measured very precisely the opening of this angle on a circumference that he divided into three hundred and sixty equal parts. Now, this angle, by adding to it the twenty-seven degrees that separate Alpha from the Antarctic pole, and by reducing the height of the plateau on which the observation had been made to sea level, turned out to be fifty-three degrees. These fifty-three degrees being subtracted from the ninety degrees—the distance from the pole to the equator—thirty-seven degrees remained. Cyrus Smith therefore concluded that Lincoln Island was located on the thirty-seventh degree of south latitude, or, taking into account, given the imperfection of his calculations, a margin of error of five degrees, that it must be located between the thirty-fifth and fortieth parallels.

The longitude still needed to be obtained to complete the island's coordinates. This is what the engineer would attempt to determine that same day, at noon, that is, when the sun crossed the meridian.

It was decided that this Sunday would be spent on a walk, or rather an exploration of that part of the island located between the north of the lake and Shark Gulf, and if the weather permitted, this reconnaissance would be extended to the northern slope of Cape Mandible-Sud. Lunch was to be had at the dunes, and they would not return until the evening.

At 8:30 in the morning, the small group followed the edge of the canal. On the other side, on the Îlot du Salut, numerous birds strolled about solemnly. They were divers, of the penguin species, easily recognizable by their unpleasant cry, reminiscent of a donkey's bray.

Pencroff considered them only from the point of view of being edible, and learned with some satisfaction that their flesh, although blackish, is quite edible.

Large amphibians, probably seals, could also be seen crawling on the sand, seemingly having chosen the islet as their refuge. It was hardly possible to examine these animals from a nutritional standpoint, as their oily flesh is unappetizing; however, Cyrus Smith observed them

carefully, and, without revealing his intention, announced to his companions that a visit to the islet would be made very soon.

The shore, followed by the colonists, was strewn with countless seashells, some of which would have delighted a malacology enthusiast. These included, among others, pheasant snails, terebratulids, trigonials, etc. But what was to prove more useful was a vast oyster bed, discovered at low tide, which Nab pointed out among the rocks, about four miles from the Chimneys.

"Nab will not have wasted his day," exclaimed Pencroff, observing the school of oysters that stretched out offshore.

"It is a fortunate discovery indeed," said the reporter, "and if, as is claimed, each oyster produces fifty to sixty thousand eggs per year, we will have an inexhaustible reserve."

"However, I don't think oysters are very nutritious," said Harbert.

"No," replied Cyrus Smith. "The oyster contains very little nitrogenous matter, and a man who ate them exclusively would need no less than fifteen to sixteen dozen a day."

"Good!" replied Pencroff. "We can eat dozens and dozens of them before we've exhausted the bench. What if we had a few for our lunch?"

And without waiting for a reply to his proposal, knowing full well that it was approved in advance, the sailor and Nab detached a certain quantity of these mollusks. They placed them in a kind of net made of hibiscus fibers, which Nab had fashioned and which already contained the meal's menu; then they continued up the coast between the dunes and the sea. From time to time, Cyrus Smith consulted his watch, in order to prepare in time for the solar observation, which was to be made at precisely noon.

This entire portion of the island was very arid up to that point which closed off Union Bay, and which had been given the name of Cape Mandible-South.

All that could be seen was sand and shells, mixed with lava debris. A few seabirds frequented this desolate coast, gulls, great albatrosses, as well as wild ducks, which rightly aroused Pencroff's covetousness.

He tried to shoot them down with arrows, but without success, because they hardly ever landed, and he would have had to hit them in flight.

This led the sailor to repeat to the engineer:

"You see, Mr. Cyrus, until we have one or two shotguns, our equipment will leave much to be desired!"

"No doubt, Pencroff," replied the reporter, "but it's entirely up to you! Get us iron for the cannons, steel for the batteries, saltpeter, coal and sulfur for the powder, mercury and nitric acid for the fulminate, and finally lead for the bullets, and Cyrus will make us first-rate rifles."

"Oh!" replied the engineer, "we can probably find all those substances on the island, but a firearm is a delicate instrument that requires very precise tools. Well, we'll see later."

"Why," cried Pencroff, "why did we have to throw overboard all these weapons that the gondola was carrying with us, and our utensils, and even our pocketknives!"

"But if we hadn't thrown them, Pencroff, it would have been us that the balloon would have thrown to the bottom of the sea!" said Harbert.

"But what you say is true, my boy!" replied the sailor.

Then, moving on to another idea:

"But, I think about it," he added, "what must have been the astonishment of Jonathan Forster and his companions when, the next morning, they found the place clear and the machine gone!"

"The least of my worries is what they might have been thinking!" said the reporter.

"But it was me who had that idea!" said Pencroff with a satisfied air.

"A fine idea, Pencroff," replied Gideon Spilett, laughing, "and one that has put us where we are!"

"I'd rather be here than in the hands of the Southerners!" cried the sailor, "especially since Mr. Cyrus was kind enough to come and join us!"

"And me too, in truth!" replied the reporter. "Besides, what are we lacking? Nothing!"

"If that's not all!" replied Pencroff, bursting into laughter and shrugging his broad shoulders. "But one day, we'll find a way to leave!"

“And perhaps sooner than you imagine, my friends,” said the engineer, “if Lincoln Island is only at a moderate distance from an inhabited archipelago or a continent. We shall know within an hour. I have no map of the Pacific, but my memory retains a very clear recollection of its southern portion. The latitude I obtained yesterday places Lincoln Island abeam of New Zealand to the west and the coast of Chile to the east. But between these two landmasses, the distance is at least six thousand miles. It remains, therefore, to determine what point the island occupies in this vast expanse of sea, and that is what the longitude will give us shortly with a sufficiently accurate approximation, I hope.”

"Isn't it," asked Harbert, "the Pomotou archipelago that is closest to us in latitude?"

— Yes, replied the engineer, but the distance between us is more than twelve hundred miles.

"And this way?" said Nab, who had been following the conversation with extreme interest, and whose hand indicated the direction of the south.

"Nothing over there," replied Pencroff.

"Nothing, indeed," added the engineer.

"Well, Cyrus," asked the reporter, "if Lincoln Island is only two or three hundred miles from New Zealand or Chile?"

"Well," replied the engineer, "instead of building a house, we'll build a boat, and Master Pencroff will take care of sailing it..."

"What, Mr. Cyrus," cried the sailor, "I am quite ready to become captain... as soon as you have found a way to build a boat sufficient to withstand the sea!"

"We will do it, if necessary!" replied Cyrus Smith.

But while these men, who truly doubted nothing, were talking, the hour was approaching when the observation was to take place. How would Cyrus Smith go about observing the sun's passage across the island's meridian without any instruments? This was something Harbert could not foresee.

The observers were then six miles from the Chimneys, not far from the part of the dunes where the engineer had been found after his enigmatic rescue. They halted there, and everything was prepared for lunch, as it was half past eleven. Harbert fetched fresh water from the nearby stream and brought it back in a jug that Nab had brought with him.

During these preparations, Cyrus Smith arranged everything for his astronomical observation. He chose a perfectly clear spot on the shore, which the receding tide had leveled flawlessly. This layer of very fine sand was as flat as ice, with not a grain protruding from another. It mattered little, moreover, whether this layer was horizontal or not, and it mattered no more whether the six-foot-high rod that was planted in it stood upright. On the contrary, the engineer inclined it to the south, that is to say, to the side opposite the sun, for it must be remembered that the colonists of Lincoln Island, by virtue of the island's location in the southern hemisphere, saw the radiant star trace its diurnal arc above the northern horizon, and not above the southern horizon.

Harbert then understood how the engineer intended to determine the sun's culmination, that is, its passage across the island's meridian, or, in other words, local noon. He would do so by means of the shadow cast on the sand by the stick, a method which, in the absence of a proper

instrument, would provide a suitable approximation for the result he wished to obtain. Indeed, the moment when this shadow reached its minimum length would be precise noon, and it would suffice to follow the tip of this shadow to recognize the instant when, after having successively shortened, it began to lengthen again. By tilting his stick in the direction opposite the sun, Cyrus Smith made the shadow longer, and, consequently, its changes would be easier to observe. In fact, the longer the pointer of a sundial, the easier it is to follow the movement of its tip. The shadow cast by the stick was nothing other than the pointer of a sundial.

When he thought the moment had arrived, Cyrus Smith knelt on the sand, and, by means of small wooden stakes which he stuck in the sand, he began to mark the successive decreases in the shadow of the wand. His companions, leaning over him, followed the operation with extreme interest.

The reporter held his stopwatch in his hand, ready to note the time he would record when the shadow was at its shortest. Furthermore, since Cyrus Smith was operating on April 16th, the day on which true time and mean time coincide, the time given by Gideon Spilett would be the true time it would be in Washington at that time, thus simplifying the calculation.

However, the sun advanced slowly; the shadow of the wand gradually diminished, and when it appeared to Cyrus Smith that it was beginning to grow again:

"What time is it?" he said.

"Five o'clock and one minute," replied Gideon Spilett immediately.

All that remained was to calculate the calculation. Nothing could be easier. As you can see, there was a five-hour difference, in round figures, between the meridian of Washington and that of Lincoln Island; that is to say, it was noon on Lincoln Island when it was already 5:00 PM in Washington. Now, the sun, in its apparent movement around the Earth, travels one degree every four minutes, or fifteen degrees per hour. Fifteen degrees multiplied by five hours gave seventy-five degrees.

So, since Washington is at 77°3'11, which is to say seventy-seven degrees measured from the Greenwich meridian, — which the Americans take as the starting point of longitudes, concurrently with the English, — it followed that the island was situated at seventy-seven degrees plus seventy-five degrees west of the Greenwich meridian, that is to say by the wind fifty-second degree of west longitude.

Cyrus Smith announced this result to his companions, and taking into account the errors of observation, as he had done for the latitude, he believed he could affirm that the deposit of Lincoln Island was between

the thirty-fifth and thirty-seventh parallel, and between the one hundred and fiftieth and one hundred and fifty-fifth meridian west of the Greenwich meridian.

The possible discrepancy that he attributed to observation errors was, as we can see, five degrees in both directions, which, at sixty miles per degree, could give an error of three hundred miles in latitude or longitude for the exact bearing.

But this error should not influence the course of action to be taken. It was quite clear that Lincoln Island was so far from any land or archipelago that it would be impossible to risk crossing that distance in a simple, fragile canoe. Indeed, its bearing placed it at least twelve hundred miles from Tahiti and the islands of the Pomotou archipelago, more than eighteen hundred miles from New Zealand, and more than four thousand five hundred miles from the American coast!

And when Cyrus Smith consulted his memories, he could not recall in any way that any island in that part of the Pacific occupied the position assigned to Lincoln Island.

CHAPTER XV

The next day, April 17, the sailor's first words were for Gideon Spilett.

"Well, sir," he asked him, "what will we be today?"

"Whatever Cyrus pleases," replied the reporter.

From being brickmakers and potters until then, the engineer's companions were going to become metallurgists.

The previous day, after lunch, the exploration had been carried out as far as the tip of Cape Mandible, nearly seven miles from the Chimneys. There the long line of dunes ended, and the ground took on a volcanic appearance. No longer were there high walls, as at the Grande Vue plateau, but a strange and capricious border framing the narrow bay between the two capes, formed from the mineral material spewed forth by the volcano. Having reached this point, the colonists retraced their steps, and, as night fell, they returned to the Chimneys, but they did not sleep until the question of whether or not to leave Lincoln Island had been definitively resolved.

The twelve hundred miles separating the island from the Pomotou archipelago were a considerable distance. A canoe would not have been sufficient to cross it, especially with the approach of the bad season.

Pencroff had stated this explicitly. However, building a simple canoe, even with the necessary tools, was a difficult task, and since the colonists lacked tools, they would have to begin by making hammers, axes, adzes, saws, augers, planes, and so on, which would take some time. It was therefore decided that they would winter on Lincoln Island

and look for a more comfortable dwelling than the Chimneys to spend the winter months.

First and foremost, the task was to use the iron ore, of which the engineer had observed some deposits in the northwestern part of the island, and to change this ore into either iron or steel.

The soil does not usually contain metals in their pure form. For the most part, they are found combined with oxygen or sulfur.

Specifically, the two samples brought back by Cyrus Smith were, one, magnetic, non-carbonated iron, and the other, pyrite, in other words, iron sulfide. It was therefore the former, iron oxide, that needed to be reduced by charcoal—that is, rid of the oxygen—to obtain it in a pure state. This reduction is achieved by subjecting the ore, in the presence of charcoal, to a high temperature, either by the quick and easy "Catalan method," which has the advantage of directly transforming the ore into iron in a single operation, or by the blast furnace method, which first transforms the ore into pig iron, then the pig iron back into iron, removing the three to four percent of charcoal that is combined with it.

Now, what did Cyrus Smith need? Iron, not cast iron, and he had to find the quickest method of reduction. Moreover, the ore he had collected was itself very pure and very rich. It was this oxidized ore which, occurring in confused masses of dark gray, yields a black

powder, crystallizes in regular octahedrons, provides natural magnets, and is used in Europe to manufacture those first-quality irons with which Sweden and Norway are so abundantly supplied. Not far from this deposit were the coal deposits already being exploited by the colonists. From there, processing the ore was greatly facilitated, since the elements of the manufacturing process were located close together.

This is precisely what makes the United Kingdom's mining operations so incredibly wealthy, where coal is used to manufacture the metal extracted from the same soil and at the same time.

"So, Mr. Cyrus," Pencroff said to him, "we are going to work the iron ore?"

— Yes, my friend, replied the engineer, and, for that, — which will not displease you, — we will begin by hunting seals on the islet.

"Seal hunting!" cried the sailor, turning to Gideon Spilett. "So you need seals to make iron?"

"Since Cyrus says so!" replied the reporter.

But the engineer had already left the Chimneys, and Pencroff prepared to hunt the seals, without having obtained any further explanation.

Soon Cyrus Smith, Harbert, Gideon Spilett, Nab, and the sailor were gathered on the shore, at a point where the canal offered a sort of fordable passage at low tide. The tide was at its lowest point, and the hunters were able to cross the canal without getting wet above their knees.

Cyrus Smith was therefore setting foot on the islet for the first time, and his companions for the second time, since that was where the balloon had first thrown them.

Upon landing, several hundred penguins gazed at them innocently. The colonists, armed with sticks, could easily have killed them, but they didn't consider this doubly pointless massacre, for it was important not to frighten the amphibians, who were lying on the sand a short distance away. They also left some very innocent penguins alone, whose wings, reduced to stumps, flattened into flippers covered with scaly-looking feathers.

The settlers therefore advanced cautiously towards the northern tip, walking on ground riddled with small hollows, which formed numerous nests for water birds. Towards the end of the islet, large black dots appeared, swimming at the surface of the water.

They looked like moving rock heads.

It was the amphibians that needed to be captured.

They had to be allowed to land, because, with their narrow pelvis, their short and dense hair, their fusiform shape, these seals, excellent swimmers, are difficult to catch in the sea, while, on the ground, their short and webbed feet allow them only a slow crawling movement.

Pencroff knew the habits of these amphibians, and he advised waiting until they were stretched out on the sand, in the rays of the sun which would soon plunge them into a deep sleep.

We would then maneuver in such a way as to cut off their retreat and strike them in the nostrils.

The hunters concealed themselves behind the coastal rocks and waited silently. An hour passed before the seals came to frolic on the sand. There were about half a dozen of them. Pencroff and Harbert then broke away to round the tip of the islet, so as to take them by surprise and cut off their retreat. Meanwhile, Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, and Nab, crawling along the rocks, crept toward the future battleground.

Suddenly, the sailor's height increased.

Pencroff cried out. The engineer and his two companions hastily threw themselves between the sea and the seals. Two of the animals, severely struck, lay dead on the sand, but the others were able to return to the sea and swim out to sea.

"The seals requested, Mr. Cyrus!" said the sailor, stepping forward towards the engineer.

"Good," replied Cyrus Smith. "We'll make blacksmith's bellows out of them!"

"Blacksmith's bellows!" cried Pencroff. "Well, those seals are lucky!"

It was, in fact, a blowing machine, necessary for ore processing, that the engineer intended to make from the skin of these amphibians. They were of medium size, as their length did not exceed six feet, and, in terms of their heads, they resembled dogs.

Since it was pointless to carry such a considerable weight as that of these two animals, Nab and Pencroff resolved to skin them on the spot, while Cyrus Smith and the reporter would finish exploring the islet.

The sailor and the black man skillfully extricated themselves from their operation, and three hours later, Cyrus Smith had at his disposal two sealskins, which he intended to use in this state, and without subjecting them to any tanning.

The settlers had to wait until the sea had gone out again, and, crossing the canal, they returned to the Chimneys.

It was no small task to stretch these hides over wooden frames designed to maintain their spacing, and to sew them together with

fibers in such a way as to trap air without too much leakage. It took several attempts. Cyrus Smith had at his disposal only the two steel blades from Top's collar, and yet he was so skillful, and his companions helped him with such intelligence, that three days later the small colony's equipment had been augmented by a blower, intended to inject air into the ore when it was heat-treated—an essential condition for the success of the operation.

It was on April 20th, early in the morning, that "the metallurgical period" began, as the reporter called it in his notes. The engineer was determined, as we know, to work directly on the coal and ore deposit. Now, according to his observations, these deposits were located at the foot of the northeastern slopes of Mount Franklin, that is to say, at a distance of six miles. It was therefore out of the question to return to Les Cheminées every day, and it was agreed that the small group would camp in a hut made of branches, so that the important operation could be monitored day and night.

With this project decided, they left early in the morning. Nab and Pencroff dragged the blower machine on a hurdle, along with a certain quantity of plant and animal provisions, which, moreover, would be replenished along the way.

The route taken was through the Jacamar woods, which were crossed obliquely from southeast to northwest, cutting through their densest section. A path had to be forged, which would later become the most direct route between the Grande-vue plateau and Mount Franklin. The trees, belonging to species already identified, were magnificent. Harbert pointed out new ones, including dragon trees, which Pencroff called "pretentious leeks"—for, despite their size, they belonged to the same lily family as onions, civets, shallots, and asparagus. These dragon trees could provide woody roots, which, when cooked, are excellent, and which, after a certain fermentation, yield a very pleasant liqueur. A supply was gathered.

This trek through the woods was long. It lasted all day, but it allowed for observation of the flora and fauna. Top, specifically in charge of wildlife, ran through the grass and undergrowth, indiscriminately flushing out all kinds of game. Harbert and Gideon Spilett killed two kangaroos with arrows, and also an animal that closely resembled a hedgehog and an anteater: the former because it rolled into a ball and bristled with quills; the latter because it had digging claws, a long, slender snout ending in a bird's beak, and an extensible tongue covered with small spines that it used to trap insects.

"And when it's in the stew," Pencroff naturally observed, "what will it look like?"

"To an excellent piece of beef," replied Harbert.

"We won't ask him for anything more," replied the sailor.

During this excursion, they spotted a few wild boars, which made no attempt to attack the small group, and it seemed unlikely they would encounter any fearsome predators, when, in a thicket, the reporter thought he saw, a few steps away from him, between the first branches of a tree, an animal he mistook for a bear, and which he calmly began to sketch. Very fortunately for Gideon Spilett, the animal in question did not belong to that fearsome family of plantigrades. It was merely a "koula," better known as a "sloth," which was the size of a large dog, with bristly, dirty-colored fur, and paws armed with strong claws, allowing it to climb trees and feed on leaves. Having verified the identity of the said animal, which was not disturbed from its occupations, Gideon Spilett erased "bear" from the legend of his sketch, put "koula" in its place, and the journey was resumed.

At five o'clock in the evening, Cyrus Smith gave the signal to halt. He was outside the forest, at the base of the powerful buttresses that supported Mount Franklin to the east. A few hundred paces away

flowed the Red Creek, and consequently, drinking water was not far away.

The camp was set up at once. In less than an hour, on the edge of the forest, nestled among the trees, a hut of branches intertwined with vines and thickened with clay provided a suitable retreat. The geological exploration was postponed until the next day. Supper was prepared, a good fire blazed in front of the hut, the spit turned, and at eight o'clock, while one of the settlers kept watch to tend the fire, in case some dangerous animal had been prowling nearby, the others slept soundly.

The following day, April 21, Cyrus Smith, accompanied by Harbert, went to search for the ancient formations where he had already found a sample of ore. He encountered the deposit at the surface, almost at the very source of the creek, at the foot of the lateral base of one of the northeastern foothills. This ore, very rich in iron, encased in its fusible gangue, was perfectly suited to the reduction method the engineer intended to use, namely the Catalan method, but simplified, as it is used in Corsica. Indeed, the Catalan method proper requires the construction of furnaces and crucibles, in which the ore and charcoal, placed in alternating layers, are transformed and reduced. But Cyrus Smith intended to save on these constructions and simply wanted to form,

with the ore and charcoal, a cubic mass at the center of which he would direct the air from his bellows. This was the method used, no doubt, by Tubal-Cain and the first metallurgists of the inhabited world. Now, what had succeeded with the grandsons of Adam, what still gave good results in lands rich in ore and fuel, could only succeed in the circumstances in which the colonists of Lincoln Island found themselves.

Like the ore, the coal was easily extracted from the surface of the ground. The ore was first broken into small pieces and cleaned by hand of the impurities that soiled its surface. Then, the coal and ore were arranged in piles and successive layers—just as a charcoal burner does with the wood he wants to carbonize. In this way, under the influence of the air blown by the blower, the coal was to be transformed into carbonic acid, then into carbon monoxide, which would reduce the iron oxide, that is, release the oxygen.

Thus the engineer proceeded. The sealskin bellows, fitted at its end with a refractory clay pipe that had been previously made in the pottery kiln, was placed near the pile of ore. Powered by a mechanism whose components consisted of a frame, fiber cords, and counterweights, it forced a supply of air into the mass, which, while raising the temperature, also contributed to the chemical transformation that would produce pure iron.

The operation was difficult. It required all the patience and ingenuity of the colonists to bring it to fruition; but finally it succeeded, and the end result was a bloom of iron, reduced to a sponge-like state, which had to be hammered and roughened—that is to say, forged—to remove the liquefied matrix. It was clear that these makeshift blacksmiths lacked even the most basic hammer; but, in the end, they found themselves in the same situation as the first metallurgist, and they did what he had to do.

The first magnifying glass, fitted with a handle, served as a hammer to forge the second on a granite anvil, and they managed to obtain a rough but usable metal. Finally, after much effort and fatigue, on April 25th, several iron bars were forged and transformed into tools—pliers, pincers, picks, shovels, etc.—which Pencroff and Nab declared to be true works of art.

But this metal, it was not in its pure iron state that it could be of great service; it was primarily in its steel form. Now, steel is a combination of iron and carbon, obtained either from pig iron by removing the excess carbon, or from iron by adding the necessary carbon. The first, obtained by decarburizing pig iron, yields natural or puddled steel; the second, produced by carburizing iron, yields case-hardening steel.

It was therefore this latter type that Cyrus Smith should have sought to produce in preference, since he possessed iron in its pure form. He succeeded by heating the metal with powdered charcoal in a crucible made of refractory clay.

Then, this steel, which is malleable both hot and cold, he worked with a hammer. Nab and Pencroff, skillfully directed, made axe heads, which, heated red-hot and plunged abruptly into cold water, acquired an excellent temper.

Other tools, crudely fashioned, needless to say, were thus manufactured: plane blades, axes, hatchets, strips of steel that were to be transformed into saws, carpenter's chisels, then pickaxe, shovel, and pickaxe heads, hammers, nails, etc. Finally, on May 5th, the first metallurgical period was completed, the blacksmiths returned to the Chimneys, and new work would soon allow them to take on a new qualification.

CHAPTER XVI

It was May 6th, which corresponds to November 6th in the northern hemisphere. The sky had been clouding over for several days, and it was important to make certain preparations for wintering. However, the temperature had not yet dropped significantly, and a Celsius

thermometer, taken to Lincoln Island, would still have registered an average of ten to twelve degrees above zero. This average was not surprising, since Lincoln Island, most likely located between the thirty-fifth and fortieth parallels, would be subject, in the southern hemisphere, to the same climatic conditions as Sicily or Greece in the northern hemisphere. But, just as Greece or Sicily experience severe cold, producing snow and ice, so too would Lincoln Island undoubtedly suffer, during the coldest period of winter, certain drops in temperature against which it was necessary to take precautions. In any case, if the cold was not yet a threat, the rainy season was coming soon, and on this isolated island, exposed to all the weather from the open sea, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, bad weather was bound to be frequent, and probably terrible.

The question of a more comfortable dwelling than the Cheminées therefore had to be seriously considered and promptly resolved.

Pencroff, naturally, had some predilection for this retreat which he had discovered; but he understood well that it was necessary to look for another one.

The Chimneys had already been visited by the sea, in circumstances which are remembered, and we could not expose ourselves to such an accident again.

"Besides," added Cyrus Smith, who was discussing these things with his companions that day, "we have some precautions to take."

"Why? The island is uninhabited," said the reporter.

“That is likely,” replied the engineer, “although we have not yet explored it in its entirety; but if no human beings are there, I fear dangerous animals abound. It is therefore advisable to take shelter from possible attack and not force any of us to stay up every night to keep a fire burning. And besides, my friends, we must plan for everything. We are here in a part of the Pacific often frequented by Malay pirates…”

"What," said Harbert, "at such a distance from any land?"

"Yes, my child," replied the engineer. "These pirates are daring sailors as well as formidable criminals, and we must take our measures accordingly."

"Well," replied Pencroff, "we will fortify ourselves against the two-legged and four-legged savages. But, Mr. Cyrus, wouldn't it be wise to explore the island in all its parts before undertaking anything?"

"That would be better," added Gideon Spilett. "Who knows if we won't find one of those caverns on the opposite coast that we searched for in vain on this one?"

“That’s true,” replied the engineer, “but you forget, my friends, that it’s essential we establish ourselves near a watercourse, and from the summit of Mount Franklin, we saw neither stream nor river to the west. Here, on the contrary, we are situated between the Mercy River and Grant Lake, a considerable advantage that shouldn’t be overlooked. Furthermore, this coast, facing east, isn’t exposed like the other to the trade winds, which blow from the northwest in this hemisphere.”

"Then, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor, "let's build a house on the shores of the lake. We have no shortage of bricks or tools now."

Having been brickmakers, potters, founders, blacksmiths, we will surely know how to be masons, what the hell!

— Yes, my friend, but before making a decision, we must search. A dwelling where nature had done all the work would save us a lot of work, and it would undoubtedly offer us an even safer retreat, for it would be as well defended against enemies within as against those without.

"Indeed, Cyrus," replied the reporter, "but we have already examined this entire granite massif on the coast, and not a hole, not even a crack!"

"No, not one!" added Pencroff. "Ah! If we could have carved a dwelling into that wall, at a certain height, so as to put it out of reach, that would

have been suitable! I can see it from here, on the facade facing the sea, five or six rooms..."

"With windows to let the light in!" said Harbert, laughing.

— And a staircase to get up there! added Nab.

“You’re laughing,” cried the sailor, “and why is that? What’s impossible about what I’m proposing? Don’t we have picks and shovels? Won’t Mr. Cyrus know how to make gunpowder to blow up the mine? Isn’t it true, Mr. Cyrus, that you’ll make gunpowder the day we need it?”

Cyrus Smith had listened to the enthusiastic Pencroff, developing his somewhat fanciful projects.

Attacking this mass of granite, even with blasting, was a Herculean task, and it was truly unfortunate that nature hadn't done the hardest part of the job. But the engineer only replied to the sailor by suggesting a more careful examination of the wall, from the river mouth to the angle at its northern end.

So we went out, and the exploration was carried out, over a distance of about two miles, with extreme care. But nowhere did the smooth, straight face reveal any cavity whatsoever. The nests of the rock pigeons that fluttered at its summit were, in reality, nothing more than holes drilled into the very crest and the irregularly cut edge of the granite.

It was an unfortunate circumstance, and attacking this massif, either with a pickaxe or with gunpowder, to create a sufficient excavation, was out of the question. By chance, Pencroff had discovered the only temporarily habitable shelter along this entire stretch of coastline: these very chimneys, which he nevertheless had to abandon.

The exploration completed, the colonists found themselves at the northern corner of the wall, where it ended in long slopes that sloped down to the shore. From this point to its westernmost limit, it formed little more than a kind of embankment, a thick agglomeration of stones, earth, and sand, held together by plants, shrubs, and grasses, inclined at an angle of only forty-five degrees. Here and there, the granite still pierced through, emerging in sharp points from this sort of cliff. Clumps of trees were tiered on its slopes, and a fairly thick layer of grass carpeted them. But the vegetation extended no further, and a long plain of sand, beginning at the foot of the embankment, stretched all the way to the coastline.

Cyrus Smith rightly believed that this must be the direction in which the lake's overflow cascaded. Indeed, the excess water supplied by the Red Creek had to disappear somewhere. However, the engineer had not yet found this point on any of the shores he had explored, that is, from the creek's mouth in the west to the Grande-vue plateau.

The engineer therefore suggested to his companions that they climb the embankment they were observing, and return to the Chimneys via the heights, exploring the northern and eastern shores of the lake.

The proposal was accepted, and within minutes Harbert and Nab had reached the upper platform. Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, and Pencroff followed them at a more measured pace.

Two hundred feet away, through the foliage, the beautiful sheet of water shimmered in the sunlight.

The landscape was charming in this spot. The trees, their hues yellowing, clustered together beautifully, a feast for the eyes. A few enormous old trunks, felled by age, stood out with their blackened bark against the verdant carpet that covered the ground. There, a whole world of noisy cockatoos chattered, veritable moving prisms, leaping from branch to branch. It seemed as if the light only reached through this singular canopy in a fragmented form.

Instead of heading directly to the north shore of the lake, the settlers skirted the edge of the plateau, reaching the mouth of the creek on its left bank. It was a detour of no more than a mile and a half. The walk was easy, as the widely spaced trees allowed ample room between them. It was clear that the fertile zone ended at this point, and the

vegetation was less vigorous than in the area between the creek and the Mercy River.

Cyrus Smith and his companions did not walk without a certain circumspection on this land new to them. Bows, arrows, sticks hafted with sharp iron, these were their only weapons.

However, no wild beasts appeared, and it was likely that these animals frequented the dense forests to the south; but the settlers had the unpleasant surprise of seeing Top stop before a large snake, which measured fourteen to fifteen feet in length. Nab stunned it with a blow from his stick. Cyrus Smith examined this reptile and declared that it was not venomous, for it belonged to the species of diamond snakes on which the natives of New South Wales eat food. But it was possible that there were others whose bite was deadly, such as those forked-tailed deaf vipers that rear up underfoot, or those winged snakes, equipped with two ear flaps that allow them to dart about with extreme speed.

Once the initial shock had passed, Top would chase the reptiles with a ferocity that made people fear for his safety. His master constantly called him back.

The mouth of Red Creek, where it flowed into the lake, was soon reached. On the opposite bank, the explorers recognized the spot they had already visited on their descent from Mount Franklin. Cyrus Smith

observed that the creek's flow was quite considerable; it was therefore necessary that nature had provided an outlet for the lake's overflow somewhere. It was this outlet that they needed to find, for it undoubtedly formed a waterfall whose mechanical power could be harnessed.

The settlers, walking at will, but without straying too far from each other, began to go around the shore of the lake, which was very steep.

The waters seemed extremely rich in fish, and Pencroff vowed to make some fishing gear in order to exploit them.

First, they had to cross the sharp northeastern point. One might have assumed that the waters drained from this spot, as the end of the lake almost reached the edge of the plateau. But this was not the case, and the settlers continued to explore the shore, which, after a slight curve, sloped down parallel to the coastline. On this side, the bank was less wooded, but a few clumps of trees, scattered here and there, added to the picturesque landscape. Lake Grant then appeared in its full expanse, and not a breath of wind rippled the surface of its waters. Top, beating the undergrowth, stirred up flocks of various birds, which Gideon Spilett and Harbert greeted with their arrows. One of these birds was even skillfully hit by the young boy and fell amidst the marshy grasses. Top rushed over and brought back a fine swimming bird, slate-colored,

with a short beak, a very prominent frontal plate, toes broadened by a scalloped edge, and wings edged with white. It was a coot, the size of a large partridge, belonging to that group of macrodactyls that forms the transition between the order of waders and that of web-footed birds. A rather poor game bird, in short, and one whose taste would leave much to be desired. But Top would undoubtedly prove less demanding than his masters, and it was agreed that the coot would serve as his supper.

The colonists were then following the eastern shore of the lake, and they were soon to reach the section they had already explored. The engineer was quite surprised, as he saw no sign of the overflow draining away. The reporter and the sailor were talking with him, and he made no attempt to hide his astonishment. At that moment, Top, who had been very calm until then, began to show signs of agitation.

The intelligent animal went back and forth on the bank, stopped suddenly, and looked at the waters, one paw raised, as if it were on point for some invisible game; then it barked furiously, as if begging, and suddenly fell silent.

Neither Cyrus Smith nor his companions had at first paid attention to Top's behavior; but the dog's barking soon became so frequent that the engineer became concerned.

"What is it, Top?" he asked.

The dog leaped several times towards its master, showing genuine concern, and then darted back towards the bank. Suddenly, it plunged into the lake.

"Here, Top!" shouted Cyrus Smith, who did not want to let his dog venture onto these suspicious waters.

"So what's going on down there?" asked Pencroff, examining the surface of the lake.

"Top must have sensed some amphibian," replied Harbert.

"An alligator, no doubt?" said the reporter.

“I don’t think so,” replied Cyrus Smith. “Alligators are only found in lower latitudes.”

However, Top had returned at his master's call and made his way back to the shore; but he couldn't stay still. He leaped among the tall grasses, and, guided by instinct, seemed to be following some invisible being that had slipped beneath the lake's waters, skimming the edges. Yet the waters were calm, and not a ripple disturbed the surface. Several times, the settlers stopped on the shore and watched carefully. Nothing appeared. There was some mystery there.

The engineer was very intrigued.

"Let's pursue this exploration to the end," he said.

Half an hour later, they had all arrived at the southeast corner of the lake and found themselves on the Grande-vue plateau itself. At this point, the examination of the lake's shores should have been considered complete, and yet the engineer had still not been able to discover where and how the water was being discharged.

"Yet this spillway exists," he repeated, "and since it is not external, it must be dug inside the granite massif of the coast!"

"But what importance do you attach to knowing that, my dear Cyrus?" asked Gideon Spilett.

"A fairly large one," replied the engineer, "because if the outflow occurs through the massif, it is possible that there is some cavity there, which it would have been easy to make habitable after diverting the waters."

"But isn't it possible, Mr. Cyrus, that the waters flow through the very bottom of the lake," said Harbert, "and go to the sea through an underground conduit?"

“That may indeed be the case,” replied the engineer, “and if so, we will be obliged to build our house ourselves, since nature has not incurred the initial costs of construction.”

The settlers were therefore preparing to cross the plateau to return to the Chimneys, for it was five o'clock in the evening, when Top showed

new signs of agitation. He was barking furiously, and, before his master could restrain him, he plunged a second time into the lake.

They all ran towards the bank. The dog was already more than twenty feet away, and Cyrus Smith was calling him back quickly, when an enormous head emerged from the surface of the water, which did not appear to be deep at that spot.

Harbert immediately recognized the species of amphibian to which this conical head with large eyes, decorated with long silky whiskers, belonged.

"A manatee!" he exclaimed.

It was not a manatee, but a specimen of that species, included in the order of cetaceans, which is called "dugong" because its nostrils were open at the top of its snout.

The enormous animal had rushed at the dog, who tried in vain to avoid it by returning to the bank. His master could do nothing to save him, and before it even occurred to Gideon Spilett or Harbert to arm their bows, Top, seized by the dugong, disappeared beneath the waters.

Nab, his iron-tipped spear in hand, wanted to rush to the dog's aid, determined to attack the formidable animal even in its element.

"No, Nab," said the engineer, restraining his courageous servant.

However, a struggle was taking place beneath the waters, an inexplicable struggle, for, under these conditions, Top obviously could not resist; a struggle that must have been terrible, as could be seen from the churning of the surface; a struggle, finally, that could only end with the dog's death! But suddenly, in the middle of a circle of foam, Top reappeared. Launched into the air by some unknown force, he rose ten feet above the surface of the lake, fell back into the midst of the deeply troubled waters, and soon reached the shore without serious injury, miraculously saved.

Cyrus Smith and his companions watched in disbelief. An equally inexplicable circumstance! It seemed as if the struggle continued underwater. No doubt the dugong, attacked by some powerful animal, had released the dog and was fighting for its own sake.

But this did not last long. The waters turned red with blood, and the body of the dugong, emerging from a scarlet sheet that spread widely, soon washed up on a small beach at the southern corner of the lake.

The colonists ran to the spot. The dugong was dead. It was an enormous animal, fifteen to sixteen feet long, and must have weighed three to four thousand pounds. A wound lay open on its neck that appeared to have been made with a sharp blade. What amphibian could have, with this terrible blow, destroyed the formidable dugong? No one

could have said, and, quite preoccupied by this incident, Cyrus Smith and his companions returned to the Chimneys.

CHAPTER XVII

The next day, May 7, Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett, leaving Nab to prepare lunch, climbed the Grande-vue plateau, while Harbert and Pencroff went up the river to replenish the wood supply.

The engineer and the reporter soon arrived at the small beach at the southern tip of the lake, where the amphibian had become stranded. Flocks of birds had already descended upon the fleshy mass, and they had to be driven away with stones, as Cyrus Smith wished to preserve the dugong's blubber and use it for the colony's needs.

As for the animal's flesh, it was sure to provide excellent food, since in certain regions of Malaysia it was reserved exclusively for the tables of native princes. But that was Nab's business. At that moment, Cyrus Smith had other thoughts on his mind. The previous day's incident had not faded from his thoughts and continued to preoccupy him. He longed to unravel the mystery of this underwater battle and discover what kind of mastodon or other sea monster had inflicted such a strange wound on the dugong.

So there he was, on the edge of the lake, watching, observing, but nothing appeared beneath the still waters, which sparkled in the first rays of sunlight. On the small beach where the dugong lay, the water was shallow; but from that point, the lakebed gradually sloped down, and it was likely that the depth in the center must be considerable. The lake could be considered a wide basin, filled by the waters of Red Creek.

"Well, Cyrus," asked the reporter, "it seems to me that these waters offer nothing suspicious?"

"No, my dear Spilett," replied the engineer, "and I really don't know how to explain yesterday's incident!"

“I confess,” continued Gideon Spilett, “that the injury inflicted on this amphibian is at the very least strange, and I cannot explain any further how it could have been that Top was so vigorously thrown out of the water. One would truly think that it was a powerful arm that hurled him thus, and that this same arm, armed with a dagger, then brought death to the dugong!”

“Yes,” replied the engineer, who had become thoughtful. “There is something here that I cannot understand. But do you understand any better, my dear Spilett, how I myself was saved, how I was pulled from the waves and carried to the dunes? No, is that not true? I therefore sense some mystery here that we will doubtless one day uncover. Let us

observe, then, but let us not dwell on these strange incidents in front of our companions. Let us keep our remarks to ourselves and continue our work.”

As we know, the engineer had not yet been able to discover where the lake's overflow escaped, but since he had seen no indication that it had ever overflowed, a spillway must necessarily exist somewhere. And indeed, Cyrus Smith was quite surprised to notice a rather strong current flowing at that very spot. He threw in some small pieces of wood and saw that they were heading towards the southern corner. He followed this current, walking along the bank, and arrived at the southern tip of the lake.

There was a sort of depression in the waters, as if they had suddenly disappeared into some crack in the ground.

Cyrus Smith listened, putting his ear to the level of the lake, and he very distinctly heard the sound of an underground waterfall.

"It is there," he said, getting up, "there that the discharge of water takes place, there, no doubt, that through a conduit dug into the granite massif they go to join the sea, through some cavities that we could use to our advantage! Well! I will know!"

The engineer cut a long branch, stripped it of its leaves, and, dipping it into the corner where the two banks met, discovered a wide opening

only a foot below the water's surface. This hole was the mouth of the spillway he had been searching for in vain, and the current was so strong that the branch was torn from the engineer's hands and disappeared.

"There is no longer any doubt now," repeated Cyrus Smith. "There is the spillway opening, and I will expose that opening."

- How? asked Gideon Spilett.

— By lowering the water level of the lake by three feet.

— And how do we lower their level?

— By opening up another, broader avenue for them than this one.

— Where, Cyrus?

— On the part of the bank that comes closest to the coast.

"But it's a granite shore!" the reporter observed.

"Well," replied Cyrus Smith, "I'll blast that granite, and the waters, as they recede, will lower so as to uncover that opening..."

— And will form a cascade when they fall onto the shore, added the reporter.

"A waterfall we'll use!" replied Cyrus. "Come on, come on!"

The engineer brought his companion along, whose confidence in Cyrus Smith was such that he had no doubt the undertaking would

succeed. And yet, this granite shore, how to open it, how, without gunpowder and with imperfect instruments, to break down these rocks? Wasn't this a task beyond his strength, one to which the engineer would relentlessly devote himself?

When Cyrus Smith and the reporter returned to the Chimneys, they found Harbert and Pencroff busy unloading their timber raft.

"The lumberjacks will be finished soon, Mr. Cyrus," said the sailor, laughing, "and when you need masons..."

"From masons, no, but from chemists," replied the engineer.

"Yes," added the reporter, "we're going to blow up the island..."

"Leap over the island!" cried Pencroff.

"At least in part!" replied Gideon Spilett.

"Listen to me, my friends," said the engineer.

And he informed them of the result of his observations. According to him, a more or less considerable cavity must exist in the mass of granite that supported the Grande-vue plateau, and he claimed to penetrate as far as it.

To achieve this, it was first necessary to clear the opening through which the water rushed, and consequently, lower its level by providing a wider outlet. Hence the need to manufacture an explosive substance

capable of creating a deep channel at another point on the bank. This is what Cyrus Smith would attempt using the minerals that nature provided.

Needless to say, everyone, and especially Pencroff, welcomed this project with enthusiasm.

To use drastic measures, to blast through that granite, to create a waterfall—that suited the sailor! And he would be just as good a chemist as a mason or a shoemaker, since the engineer needed chemists. He would be anything anyone wanted, "even a dance and deportment teacher," he told Nab, if it were ever necessary.

Nab and Pencroff were initially tasked with extracting the dugong's blubber and preserving the meat, which was intended for consumption. They left immediately, without even asking for further explanation. Their trust in the engineer was absolute. A few moments later, Cyrus Smith, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett, dragging the hurdle and heading upstream, made their way toward the coal seam where the shale pyrites found in the most recent transitional formations were abundant, and of which Cyrus Smith had already brought back a sample.

The entire day was spent hauling a certain quantity of these pyrites to the Chimneys. By evening, there were several tons of them.

The following day, May 8th, the engineer began his experiments. These schistose pyrites being composed mainly of coal, silica, alumina, and iron sulfide—the latter in excess—the aim was to isolate the iron sulfide and transform it into sulfate as quickly as possible. From the sulfate obtained, sulfuric acid would be extracted.

That was indeed the goal. Sulfuric acid is one of the most widely used agents, and a nation's industrial importance can be measured by its consumption of it. This acid would later prove extremely useful to the colonists for making candles, tanning hides, and so on, but at that moment, the engineer was reserving it for another use.

Cyrus Smith chose a location behind the Chimneys where the ground was carefully leveled. On this ground, he placed a pile of branches and chopped wood, on which were placed pieces of pyritic shale, braced against each other; then, the whole thing was covered with a thin layer of pyrites, previously reduced to the size of a walnut.

Having done this, they set fire to the wood, the heat of which spread to the shale, which caught fire, since it contained charcoal and sulfur.

Then, new layers of crushed pyrite were arranged to form an enormous pile, which was covered externally with earth and grass, after some vents had been made in it, as if it were a matter of carbonizing a woodpile to make charcoal.

Then the transformation was allowed to take place, and it took no less than ten to twelve days for the iron sulfide to be changed into iron sulfate and the alumina into aluminum sulfate, two substances that were equally soluble, the others, silica, burnt coal and ashes, not being so.

While this chemical work was being carried out, Cyrus Smith had other operations performed. They were doing more than just zeal. They were being relentless.

Nab and Pencroff had removed the dugong's fat, which had been collected in large earthenware jars. The aim was to isolate one of its components, glycerin, by saponifying it. To achieve this, it was simply a matter of treating it with soda or lime. Indeed, either of these substances, after breaking down the fat, would form a soap by isolating the glycerin, and it was precisely this glycerin that the engineer wanted to obtain. Lime was not lacking, as we know; however, treatment with lime would only produce calcareous soaps, insoluble and therefore useless, while treatment with soda would, on the contrary, yield a soluble soap, suitable for household cleaning.

However, being a practical man, Cyrus Smith should have been looking to obtain soda ash. Was that difficult?

No, because marine plants abounded on the shore: glasswort, ice plant, and all those fucaceae that form kelp and seaweed. A large quantity of these plants was therefore gathered, first dried, and then burned in open pits. The burning of these plants was maintained for several days, so that the heat rose to the point of melting the ashes, and the result of the incineration was a compact, grayish mass, which has long been known as "natural soda."

Having obtained this result, the engineer treated the grease with soda, which produced, on the one hand, a soluble soap, and, on the other hand, this neutral substance, glycerin.

But that wasn't all. Cyrus Smith also needed another substance for his future preparation: potassium nitrate, which is better known as nitrite salt or saltpeter.

Cyrus Smith could have manufactured this substance by treating potassium carbonate, which is easily extracted from plant ashes, with nitric acid. But he lacked nitric acid, and it was precisely this acid that he ultimately wanted to obtain. Thus, he was trapped in a vicious cycle from which he would never escape.

Fortunately, this time nature would provide him with saltpeter, requiring him to do nothing more than collect it. Harbert discovered a

deposit in the north of the island, at the foot of Mount Franklin, and all that remained was to purify the salt.

These various tasks lasted about eight days. They were therefore completed before the transformation of the sulfide into iron sulfate had been accomplished. During the following days, the colonists had time to make refractory pottery from plastic clay and to build a specially designed brick furnace intended for distilling the iron sulfate once it was obtained. All this was finished around May 18th, approximately when the chemical transformation was completed. Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Nab, and Pencroff, skillfully guided by the engineer, had become the most adept workers in the world. Necessity, moreover, is the master who is most listened to and who teaches best.

When the pile of pyrite had been completely reduced by fire, the resulting mixture—iron sulfate, aluminum sulfate, silica, charcoal residue, and ash—was placed in a basin filled with water. This mixture was stirred, left to settle, and then decanted, yielding a clear liquid containing dissolved iron sulfate and aluminum sulfate, the other materials remaining solid, as they were insoluble. Finally, as this liquid partially evaporated, crystals of iron sulfate settled, and the mother liquors—that is, the unvaporized liquid containing aluminum sulfate—were discarded.

Cyrus Smith therefore had at his disposal a fairly large quantity of these iron sulfate crystals, from which it was necessary to extract sulfuric acid.

In industrial practice, the production of sulfuric acid requires a costly installation. It necessitates considerable factories, specialized equipment, platinum apparatus, lead chambers impervious to acid, in which the transformation takes place, and so on. The engineer did not have this equipment at his disposal, but he knew that in Bohemia, in particular, sulfuric acid was produced by simpler means, which even had the advantage of producing it at a higher degree of concentration.

This is how the acid known as Nordhausen acid is made.

To obtain sulfuric acid, Cyrus Smith only had one more operation to perform: calcining the iron sulfate crystals in a closed vessel, so that the sulfuric acid would distill into vapors, which vapors would then produce the acid by condensation.

It was for this manipulation that the refractory earthenware pots, in which the crystals were placed, and the furnace, whose heat was to distill the sulfuric acid, were used. The operation was carried out perfectly, and on May 20, twelve days after it began, the engineer possessed the agent that he intended to use later in so many different ways.

So why did he want this agent? Quite simply to produce nitric acid, and this was easy, since saltpeter, attacked by sulfuric acid, gave him precisely this acid by distillation.

But, in the end, what was he going to use this nitric acid for? That was what his companions did not yet know, for he had not yet said the last word on his work.

However, the engineer was nearing his goal, and one last operation provided him with the substance that had required so much manipulation.

After taking nitric acid, he placed it in the presence of glycerin, which had been previously concentrated by evaporation in a water bath, and he obtained, even without using a refrigerating mixture, several pints of an oily and yellowish liquid.

Cyrus Smith carried out this last operation alone, away from the Chimneys, because it presented dangers of explosion, and when he brought a bottle of this liquid back to his friends, he simply told them: "Here is nitroglycerin!"

It was, in fact, that terrible substance, whose explosive power is perhaps ten times that of ordinary gunpowder, and which has already caused so many accidents! However, since a method has been discovered to transform it into dynamite—that is, to mix it with a solid

substance, such as clay or sugar, porous enough to retain it—the dangerous liquid could be used more safely. But dynamite was still unknown at the time when the colonists were operating on Lincoln Island.

"And this is the liquor that's going to blow up our rocks?" said Pencroff, looking rather incredulous.

— Yes, my friend, replied the engineer, and this nitroglycerin will produce all the more effect, as this granite is extremely hard and will offer greater resistance to bursting.

— And when will we see that, Mr. Cyrus?

"Tomorrow, as soon as we have dug a mine shaft," replied the engineer.

The next day—May 21—at dawn, the miners went to a point that formed the eastern shore of Grant Lake, only five hundred paces from the shore. At this point, the plateau was lower than the water, which was held back only by its granite frame. It was therefore obvious that if this frame were broken, the water would escape through this opening and form a stream which, after flowing down the sloping surface of the plateau, would rush onto the shore. Consequently, there would be a general lowering of the lake level and the spillway opening exposed—which was the ultimate goal.

So that was the framework that needed to be broken.

Under the engineer's direction, Pencroff, armed with a pickaxe which he wielded skillfully and vigorously, attacked the granite on the outer face. The hole to be drilled originated on a horizontal ridge of the bank and was to be driven obliquely, so as to encounter a level significantly lower than that of the lake's waters. In this way, the explosive force, by pushing the rocks apart, would allow the waters to flow freely outwards and, consequently, lower sufficiently.

The work was lengthy, as the engineer, wanting to produce a formidable effect, intended to use no less than ten liters of nitroglycerin for the operation. But Pencroff, assisted by Nab, did such a good job that, around four o'clock in the evening, the mine shaft was finished.

The question of how to ignite the explosive substance remained. Ordinarily, nitroglycerin ignites using fulminate primers which, upon bursting, trigger the explosion. Indeed, a shock is necessary to cause the explosion, and, if simply ignited, this substance would burn without exploding.

Cyrus Smith could certainly have made a primer. Lacking fulminate, he could easily have obtained a substance similar to guncotton, since he had nitric acid at his disposal.

This substance, pressed into a cartridge and introduced into nitroglycerin, would have burst by means of a fuse and caused the explosion.

But Cyrus Smith knew that nitroglycerin has the property of detonating on impact. He therefore resolved to exploit this property, even if it meant using another method should the first fail. Indeed, the impact of a hammer on a few drops of nitroglycerin, spread on the surface of a hard stone, was enough to cause an explosion. But the operator could not be present to deliver the hammer blow without becoming a victim of the process.

Cyrus Smith therefore devised a method of suspending a mass of iron weighing several pounds from a post above the mine shaft, using a plant fiber. Another long fiber, previously treated with sulfur, was attached to the middle of the first by one end, while the other end trailed along the ground several feet from the mine shaft. When this second fiber was lit, it would burn until it reached the first. The first fiber, catching fire in turn, would break, and the mass of iron would precipitate onto the nitroglycerin.

This apparatus was therefore installed; then the engineer, after having his companions removed, filled the mine hole so that the nitroglycerin came to the surface of the opening, and he threw a few

drops of it onto the surface of the rock, below the mass of iron already suspended.

Having done this, Cyrus Smith took the end of the sulfur fiber, lit it, and, leaving the place, returned to meet his companions at the Chimneys.

The fiber was supposed to burn for twenty-five minutes, and indeed, twenty-five minutes later, an explosion, beyond description, resounded. It seemed as if the entire island trembled on its foundations. A shower of stones was hurled into the air as if spewed forth from a volcano. The shock produced by the displaced air was so great that the rocks of the Chimneys swayed. The colonists, although they were more than two miles from the mine, were thrown to the ground.

They got up, climbed back onto the plateau, and ran towards the spot where the lake's shore must have been ripped open by the explosion... A triple hurrah burst from their chests! The granite frame was split open across a wide area! A swift stream of water gushed out, raced foaming across the plateau, reached the crest, and plunged three hundred feet down onto the shore!

CHAPTER XVIII

Cyrus Smith's project had succeeded; but, as was his custom, without showing any satisfaction, his lips pressed tight, his gaze fixed, he remained motionless. Harbert was enthusiastic; Nab jumped for joy; Pencroff tossed his large head and murmured these words: "Come on, our engineer is doing well!"

Indeed, the nitroglycerin had had a powerful effect. The cut made in the lake was so significant that the volume of water now flowing out through this new spillway was at least three times that which previously passed through the old one. It was therefore inevitable that, shortly after the operation, the lake level would have dropped by at least two feet.

The settlers returned to the Chimneys to retrieve picks, iron-tipped spears, fiber ropes, a tinderbox, and amadou; then they returned to the plateau. Top accompanied them.

Along the way, the sailor couldn't help but say to the engineer:

"But do you know, Mr. Cyrus, that with this charming liqueur you have made, our entire island could be blown up?"

"Without a doubt, the island, the continents, and the earth itself," replied Cyrus Smith. "It's only a question of quantity."

"Couldn't you use this nitroglycerin for loading firearms?" asked the sailor.

"No, Pencroff, because it's too brittle a substance. But it would be easy to manufacture cotton powder, or even ordinary gunpowder, since we have nitric acid, saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal. Unfortunately, those are the weapons we lack."

"Oh, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor, "with a little goodwill!..."

Clearly, Pencroff had erased the word "impossible" from the Lincoln Island dictionary.

The settlers, having arrived at the Grande-vue plateau, immediately headed towards the tip of the lake, near which was the opening of the old spillway, which was now to be exposed.

The spillway would thus have become usable, since the waters would no longer rush into it, and it would undoubtedly be easy to discern its internal layout. In a few moments, the settlers had reached the lower corner of the lake, and a glance was enough for them to see that the desired result had been achieved. Indeed, in the granite wall of the lake, and now above the water level, the long-sought opening appeared. A narrow shoulder, left exposed by the receding waters, allowed access. This opening was about twenty feet wide, but only two feet high. It was like a sewer grate at the edge of a sidewalk. This opening could not, therefore, have provided easy passage for the settlers; but Nab and

Pencroff took their pickaxe, and, in less than an hour, they had raised it to a sufficient height.

The engineer then approached and observed that the upper walls of the spillway did not exceed a slope of thirty to thirty-five degrees. They were therefore passable, and, provided their incline did not increase, it would be easy to lower them down to sea level. If, then, as was highly probable, some large cavity existed within the granite massif, a way might perhaps be found to utilize it.

"Well, Mr. Cyrus, what's stopping us?" asked the sailor, eager to venture into the narrow corridor. "You see that Top has gone ahead of us!"

"Good," replied the engineer. "But we need to see clearly." "Nab, go and cut some resinous branches."

Nab and Harbert ran to the shores of the lake, shaded by pines and other green trees, and soon returned with branches which they arranged into torches. These torches were lit with a flint and steel, and, with Cyrus Smith at their head, the colonists entered the dark channel which the overflowing waters had once filled.

Contrary to what one might have expected, the diameter of this tunnel gradually widened, so that the explorers were almost immediately able to stand upright as they descended. The granite walls,

worn smooth by water over an eternity, were slippery, and they had to be careful to avoid falls. Therefore, the colonists had tied themselves together with a rope, just as mountaineers do in the mountains. Fortunately, a few granite outcrops, forming veritable steps, made the descent less perilous. Droplets, still clinging to the rocks, shimmered here and there in the torchlight, and one might have thought the walls were covered with countless stalactites.

The engineer examined the black granite. He saw not a single stratum, not a single fault. The mass was compact and extremely fine-grained. This tunnel, therefore, dated back to the very origin of the island. It was not the waters that had gradually carved it out. Pluto, not Neptune, had bored it with his own hand, and one could distinguish on the wall the traces of an eruptive process that the washing away of water had not been able to completely erase.

The colonists descended very slowly. They were understandably apprehensive, venturing into the depths of this mountain range, which human beings were clearly visiting for the first time. They didn't speak, but they reflected—and this thought must have occurred to more than one of them—that some octopus or other gigantic cephalopod might inhabit the internal cavities, which connected to the sea. It was therefore necessary to proceed with caution.

Moreover, Top was at the head of the small group, and one could rely on the dog's sagacity, which would not fail to raise the alarm if necessary.

After descending about a hundred feet, following a rather winding path, Cyrus Smith, who had been walking ahead, stopped, and his companions joined him. The place where they halted was hollowed out, forming a cavern of modest size. Drops of water fell from its ceiling, but they did not come from seepage through the rock. They were simply the last traces left by the torrent that had roared for so long in this cavity, and the air, slightly damp, gave off no noxious odor.

“Well, my dear Cyrus?” said Gideon Spilett. “Here is a retreat well ignored, well hidden in these depths, but, in short, it is uninhabitable.”

"Why uninhabitable?" asked the sailor.

— Because it is too small and too dark.

"Can't we enlarge it, dig it out, make openings for daylight and air?" replied Pencroff, who no longer doubted anything.

"Let us continue," replied Cyrus Smith, "let us continue our exploration. Perhaps, further down, nature will have spared us this task."

"We are only a third of the way up," Harbert observed.

"About a third," replied Cyrus Smith, "for we have descended about a hundred feet from the opening, and it is not impossible that a hundred feet lower..."

"Where is Top?" asked Nab, interrupting his master.

They searched the cave. The dog wasn't there.

"He will probably have continued on his way," said Pencroff.

"Let's join him," replied Cyrus Smith.

The descent was resumed. The engineer carefully observed the deviations that the spillway underwent, and, despite so many detours, he was quite easily aware of its general direction, which was towards the sea.

The settlers had descended another fifty feet or so along the perpendicular when their attention was drawn to distant sounds coming from the depths of the mountain. They stopped and listened. These sounds, carried through the corridor like a voice through a sounding tube, reached the ear clearly.

"That's Top's barking!" Harbert exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Pencroff, "and our brave dog is even barking furiously!"

"We have our iron-tipped spears," said Cyrus Smith. "Let's be on our guard, and forward!"

"This is getting more and more interesting," Gideon Spilett whispered in the sailor's ear, who nodded in agreement.

Cyrus Smith and his companions rushed to the dog's aid. Top's barking was becoming increasingly noticeable. A strange rage could be heard in his halting voice.

Was he then struggling with some animal whose retreat he had disturbed? It can be said that, without considering the danger to which they were exposing themselves, the colonists now felt seized by an irresistible curiosity. They no longer descended the corridor, they let themselves, so to speak, slide down its wall, and, in a few minutes, sixty feet lower, they had reached Top.

There, the corridor led to a vast and magnificent cavern. There, Top, pacing back and forth, barked furiously. Pencroff and Nab, shaking their torches, cast great flashes of light on every rough spot in the granite, and, at the same time, Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, and Harbert, with spears raised, stood ready for any eventuality.

The enormous cavern was empty. The colonists searched it from every angle. There was nothing there, not an animal, not a living being! And yet, Top continued to bark. Neither caresses nor threats could silence him.

"There must be some outlet somewhere through which the waters of the lake flowed to the sea," said the engineer.

"Indeed," replied Pencroff, "and let us be careful not to fall into a hole."

— Go, Top, go!” shouted Cyrus Harding.

The dog, excited by his master's words, ran to the end of the cave, and there his barking intensified.

We followed him, and, by torchlight, the opening of a veritable well appeared, opening in the granite. This was indeed the outlet for the waters that had once flowed into the massif, and this time it was no longer an oblique and passable corridor, but a perpendicular shaft, into which it would have been impossible to venture.

The torches were leaned over the opening.

Nothing was seen. Cyrus Smith detached a burning branch and threw it into the abyss. The glowing resin, its illuminating power increased by the speed of its fall, lit up the inside of the well, but nothing yet appeared. Then, the flame died down with a slight flicker, indicating that it had reached the water table, that is to say, sea level.

The engineer, calculating the time taken for the fall, was able to estimate the depth of the well, which turned out to be about ninety feet.

The cave floor was therefore located ninety feet above sea level.

“This is our home,” said Cyrus Smith.

"But it was occupied by some being," replied Gideon Spilett, who did not find his curiosity satisfied.

"Well, whatever being it was, amphibious or otherwise, fled through that exit," replied the engineer, "and gave us the place."

"Never mind," added the sailor, "I wish I'd been Top a quarter of an hour ago, because after all, he didn't bark without reason!"

Cyrus Smith was looking at his dog, and any of his companions who approached him would have heard him murmur these words:

"Yes, I think Top knows more about many things than we do!"

However, the colonists' wishes had largely been fulfilled. Chance, aided by the remarkable sagacity of their leader, had fortunately served them. They had at their disposal a vast cavern, whose capacity they could not yet estimate by the insufficient light of their torches, but which would certainly be easy to divide into rooms by means of brick partitions and to adapt, if not as a house, at least as a spacious apartment. The waters had abandoned it and could not return.

The seat was free.

Two difficulties remained: first, the possibility of illuminating this excavation hewn from a solid block; second, the need to make access easier. Lighting from above was out of the question, since an enormous thickness of granite covered the ceiling above it; but perhaps the front wall, facing the sea, could be pierced. Cyrus Smith, who, during the descent, had made a fairly accurate estimate of the slope, and consequently the length, of the spillway, was justified in believing that the front part of the wall must be quite thin. If lighting could be achieved in this way, access would also be possible, for it would be as easy to cut a doorway as windows, and to install an external ladder.

Cyrus Smith shared his ideas with his companions.

"Well then, Mr. Cyrus, get to work!" replied Pencroff. "I have my pickaxe, and I'll know how to make my way through this wall. Where should I strike?"

"Here," replied the engineer, pointing out to the vigorous sailor a rather considerable recess in the wall, which was intended to reduce its thickness.

Pencroff attacked the granite, and for half an hour, by torchlight, he sent shards flying around him. The rock sparkled beneath his pick. Nab relieved him, then Gideon Spilett after Nab.

This work had been going on for two hours already, and it was therefore possible to fear that at this point the wall might exceed the length of the pick, when, with a final blow struck by Gideon Spilett, the instrument, passing through the wall, fell outside.

"Hurrah! Always hurrah!" cried Pencroff.

The wall was only three feet thick at that point.

Cyrus Smith peered into the opening, which towered eighty feet above the ground. Before him lay the edge of the shore, the islet, and beyond, the vast sea.

But through this rather wide opening—for the rock had noticeably crumbled—light streamed in, producing a magical effect as it flooded this splendid cavern! While its left side measured no more than thirty feet high and wide by one hundred feet long, its right side, on the contrary, was enormous, its vault curving to a height of over eighty feet. In several places, irregularly placed granite pillars supported its sloping sides like those of a cathedral nave.

Supported by a kind of lateral pier, here curving into arches, there rising on pointed ribs, disappearing into dark bays whose whimsical arches could be glimpsed in the shadows, and lavishly adorned with projections that formed like so many pendentives, this vault offered a picturesque blend of all that Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic

architecture had produced at the hands of man. And yet, here, it was only the work of nature! Nature alone had carved this enchanting Alhambra from a mass of granite!

The colonists were filled with awe. Where they expected to find only a narrow cavity, they found a kind of wondrous palace, and Nab had uncovered himself, as if he had been transported into a temple! Cries of admiration erupted from every mouth. The hurrahs resounded and echoed to the depths of the dark naves.

"Ah! my friends," cried Cyrus Smith, "when we have fully illuminated the interior of this massif, when we have arranged our rooms, our stores, our offices in its left part, we will still have this splendid cavern, which we will make our study and our museum!

"And we'll call him?" asked Harbert.

"Granite-House," replied Cyrus Smith, a name which his companions greeted with further hurrahs.

At this moment, the torches were almost entirely consumed, and since, in order to return, it was necessary to regain the top of the plateau by going back up the corridor, it was decided that the work relating to the development of the new dwelling would be postponed until the next day.

Before leaving, Cyrus Smith leaned once more over the dark shaft, which plunged straight down to sea level. He listened intently. No sound was heard, not even the sound of the water, which the swell must sometimes stir in those depths. Another burning resin was thrown. The walls of the shaft lit up for a moment, but, no more this time than the first, was anything suspicious revealed.

If any sea monster had been unexpectedly surprised by the receding waters, it had now returned to the open sea through the underground conduit which extended under the shore, and which was followed by the overflow of the lake, before a new exit had been offered to it.

However, the engineer, motionless, listening attentively, his gaze fixed on the abyss, did not utter a single word.

The sailor then approached him, and, touching him on the arm:

"Mr. Smith?" he said.

"What do you want, my friend?" replied the engineer, as if he had returned from the land of dreams.

— The torches will soon go out.

"Let's go!" replied Cyrus Smith.

The small group left the cavern and began their ascent through the dark spillway. Top brought up the rear, still making strange grunting

noises. The climb was quite arduous. The colonists paused for a few moments at the upper cave, which formed a sort of landing halfway up the long granite staircase. Then they resumed their ascent.

Soon a cooler air was felt. The droplets, dried by evaporation, no longer glittered on the walls. The sooty light of the torches paled. The one Nab carried went out, and, to avoid venturing into the midst of profound darkness, they had to hurry.

This was done, and, a little before four o'clock, at the moment when the sailor's torch went out in turn, Cyrus Smith and his companions emerged through the opening of the spillway.

CHAPTER XIX

The following day, May 22nd, work began on the special adaptation of the new dwelling. The colonists were indeed eager to exchange their inadequate shelter at Les Cheminées for this vast and healthy retreat, carved out of solid rock, sheltered from the sea and the sky. These latter dwellings were not to be entirely abandoned, however, and the engineer's plan was to convert them into a workshop for major construction projects.

Cyrus Smith's first concern was to determine the precise point at which the facade of Granite-House was built. He went to the beach, at

the foot of the enormous wall, and, as the pickaxe, which had slipped from the reporter's hands, must have fallen perpendicularly, it was enough to find this pickaxe to identify the spot where the hole had been drilled in the granite.

The pickaxe was easily found, and indeed, a hole opened in a perpendicular line above the point where it had become embedded in the sand, about eighty feet above the shore. A few rock pigeons were already going in and out of this narrow opening. It truly seemed as if Granite House had been discovered for their sake!

The engineer's intention was to divide the right portion of the cavern into several chambers preceded by an entrance corridor, and to illuminate it by means of five windows and a door cut into the facade.

Pencroff did accept the five windows, but he did not understand the purpose of the door, since the old spillway provided a natural staircase, through which it would always be easy to gain access to Granite-House.

“My friend,” replied Cyrus Smith, “if it is easy for us to reach our home by way of the spillway, it will be equally easy for others. I intend, on the contrary, to obstruct this spillway at its opening, to block it hermetically.”

"And how will we get in?" asked the sailor.

"By an outside ladder," replied Cyrus Smith, "a rope ladder, which, once removed, will make it impossible to access our dwelling."

"But why so many precautions?" said Pencroff. "So far, the animals haven't seemed very dangerous to us. And as for being inhabited by natives, our island certainly isn't!"

"Are you quite sure of that, Pencroff?" asked the engineer, looking at the sailor.

"We will only be sure of that, obviously, when we have explored it in all its parts," replied Pencroff.

“Yes,” said Cyrus Smith, “for we know only a small portion of it so far. But in any case, if we have no enemies within, they may come from without, for these are dangerous waters, these waters of the Pacific. Let us therefore take precautions against every eventuality.”

Cyrus Smith spoke wisely, and, without making any further objection, Pencroff prepared to carry out his orders.

The façade of Granite House was to be lit by five windows and a door, providing access to what constituted the "apartment" proper, and by a large bay window and bull's-eye windows that would allow abundant light to enter the magnificent nave intended to serve as the great hall. This façade, situated eighty feet above the ground, faced east, and the rising sun greeted it with its first rays. It extended along that section of

the curtain wall between the salient forming an angle at the mouth of the Mercy and a line drawn perpendicularly above the pile of rocks that formed the Chimneys.

Thus the bad winds, that is to say those from the northeast, only struck it indirectly, because it was protected by the very orientation of the salient.

Moreover, while waiting for the window frames to be made, the engineer intended to close the openings with thick shutters, which would not let in either wind or rain, and which he could conceal if necessary.

The first task, therefore, was to avoid these openings. Maneuvering the pickaxe on this hard rock would have been too slow, and Cyrus Smith was known for his decisive actions. He still had a certain quantity of nitroglycerin at his disposal, and he used it to good effect. The explosive substance's effect was conveniently localized, and, under its force, the granite broke apart in the very places chosen by the engineer. Then, the pick and shovel completed the pointed arch of the five windows, the large bay window, the bull's-eye windows, and the doorway; they straightened their frames, whose profiles were rather capriciously determined, and, a few days after the work began, Granite

House was brightly lit by the light of the rising sun, which penetrated even its most secret depths.

According to the plan drawn up by Cyrus Smith, the apartment was to be divided into five compartments overlooking the sea: on the right, an entrance served by a door to which the ladder would lead, then a first bedroom-kitchen, thirty feet wide, a dining room, measuring forty feet, a bedroom-dormitory, of equal width, and finally a "guest room", requested by Pencroff, which adjoined the great hall.

These rooms, or rather this suite of rooms, which formed the Granite House apartment, were not intended to occupy the entire depth of the cavern. They were to be accessed by a corridor leading between them and a long storeroom, in which utensils, provisions, and supplies would find ample space. All the products gathered on the island, both flora and fauna, would be preserved there in excellent conditions and completely protected from humidity. Space was not lacking, and each item could be methodically arranged. In addition, the colonists still had at their disposal the small cave located above the large cavern, which would serve as the attic of the new dwelling.

With this plan finalized, all that remained was to put it into action. The miners thus became brickmakers again; then, the bricks were brought and deposited at the foot of Granite-House.

Until then, Cyrus Smith and his companions had only been able to access the cavern via the old spillway. This method of communication required them first to climb onto the Grande-vue plateau by making a detour along the riverbank, then to descend two hundred feet through the passage, and then to climb the same distance again when they wanted to return to the plateau. This resulted in considerable wasted time and fatigue. Cyrus Smith therefore resolved to proceed without delay to the construction of a sturdy rope ladder, which, once raised, would render the entrance to Granite-House completely inaccessible.

This ladder was crafted with extreme care, and its uprights, formed from the fibers of the "curry rush" braided using a reel, had the strength of a thick cable. As for the rungs, they were made from a type of red cedar, with light and sturdy branches, and the entire structure was masterfully crafted by Pencroff.

Other ropes were also made from plant fibers, and a kind of crude pulley was installed at the door. In this way, the bricks could be easily removed down to the level of Granite House. The transport of materials was thus greatly simplified, and the actual interior work began immediately. Lime was plentiful, and several thousand bricks were on hand, ready for use. The framework for the partitions, quite rudimentary in fact, was easily erected, and in a very short time, the

apartment was divided into rooms and a storeroom, according to the agreed plan.

These various tasks were carried out quickly under the engineer's direction, who himself wielded the hammer and trowel. No trade was foreign to Cyrus Smith, who thus set an example for his intelligent and zealous companions. They worked with confidence, even cheerfully, Pencroff always having a joke ready, sometimes a carpenter, sometimes a rope maker, sometimes a mason, and spreading his good humor to everyone. His faith in the engineer was absolute. Nothing could have shaken it.

He believed him capable of undertaking anything and succeeding at everything. The question of clothing and footwear—a serious matter indeed—that of lighting during winter nights, the development of the island's fertile areas, the transformation of this wild flora into a civilized one—all seemed easy to him, with Cyrus Smith's help, and everything would be done in due time. He dreamed of canalized rivers, facilitating the transport of the island's resources, of quarries and mines to be developed, of machines suitable for all industrial activities, of railways—yes, railways!—whose network would surely one day cover Lincoln Island.

The engineer let Pencroff speak. He didn't diminish the exaggerations of this brave soul. He knew how contagious confidence is; he even smiled as he listened, and said nothing of the anxieties that the future sometimes inspired in him. Indeed, in this part of the Pacific, apart from the passage of ships, he feared he would never be rescued. It was therefore on themselves, on themselves alone, that the colonists had to rely, for the distance from Lincoln Island to any other land was such that venturing out on a boat, necessarily of mediocre construction, would be a serious and perilous undertaking.

"But, as the sailor said, they were a hundred cubits ahead of the Robinsons of old, for whom everything was a miracle."

And indeed, they "knew," and the man who "knows" succeeds where others would inevitably stagnate and perish.

During this work, Harbert distinguished himself. He was intelligent and active, a quick learner, and a skilled worker, and Cyrus Smith grew increasingly fond of the boy. Harbert felt a deep and respectful friendship for the engineer. Pencroff clearly saw the close bond developing between the two, but he felt no jealousy.

Nab was Nab. He was what he would always be: courage, zeal, devotion, selflessness personified. He had the same faith in his master as Pencroff, but he expressed it less loudly. When the sailor became

enthusiastic, Nab always seemed to reply, "But nothing could be more natural." He and Pencroff were very fond of each other and had soon been on familiar terms.

As for Gideon Spilett, he took his share of the work, and wasn't the most clumsy—something that always surprised the sailor a little. A skilled "journalist," not only at understanding everything, but at executing everything!

The ladder was permanently installed on May 28th.

There were no fewer than one hundred rungs on its perpendicular height of eighty feet. Cyrus Smith had fortunately been able to divide it in two, taking advantage of an overhang in the wall that projected some forty feet above the ground. This overhang, carefully leveled with a pickaxe, became a kind of platform to which the first ladder was fixed, thus halving its sway, and which could be raised to the level of Granite House with a rope. As for the second ladder, it was secured both at its lower end, which rested on the overhang, and at its upper end, attached to the gate itself. In this way, the ascent became considerably easier.

Moreover, Cyrus Smith planned to later install a hydraulic elevator which would prevent any fatigue and wasted time for the inhabitants of Granite-House.

The colonists quickly learned to use the ladder. They were agile and nimble, and Pencroff, being a sailor accustomed to running along the shrouds, was able to give them lessons. But he also had to teach Top. The poor dog, with his four legs, wasn't built for this kind of exercise. But Pencroff was such a zealous instructor that Top eventually mastered the climbs and soon ascended the ladder as his kind commonly do in circuses. It's hard to say whether the sailor was proud of his pupil. And yet, more than once, Pencroff carried him on his back, something Top never complained about.

It should be noted here that during these works, which were nevertheless actively carried out because the harsh season was approaching, the question of food had not been neglected. Every day, the reporter and Harbert, who had effectively become the colony's suppliers, devoted a few hours to hunting. They were still only exploiting the Jacamar woods, on the left bank of the river, because, lacking a bridge and a canoe, the Mercy River had not yet been crossed. All those immense forests, which had been given the name "Wild West forests," were therefore unexplored. This important excursion was reserved for the first fine days of next spring. But the Jacamar woods were sufficiently rich in game; kangaroos and wild boars abounded there, and the hunters' iron-tipped spears, bows, and arrows worked

wonders. Furthermore, Harbert discovered, near the southwest corner of the lagoon, a natural warren, a sort of slightly damp meadow covered with willows and aromatic herbs that perfumed the air, such as thyme, wild thyme, basil, and savory—all fragrant species of the mint family, which rabbits are so fond of. Upon the reporter's observation that, since the table was set for rabbits, it would be surprising if the rabbits were absent, the two hunters carefully explored this warren. In any case, it produced an abundance of useful plants, and a naturalist would have had the opportunity there to study many specimens of the plant kingdom. Harbert thus collected a certain quantity of basil, rosemary, lemon balm, betony, and other shoots, which possess various therapeutic properties: some are expectorant, astringent, and febrifuge, while others are antispasmodic or antirheumatic. And when, later, Pencroff asked what all that harvest of herbs would be used for:

"To take care of us," replied the young boy, "to treat us when we are sick."

"Why would we be sick, since there are no doctors on the island?" replied Pencroff very seriously.

There was nothing to say in reply, but the young boy gathered his harvest nonetheless, which was very well received at Granite-House. All the more so since, in addition to these medicinal plants, he was able to

add a considerable quantity of bee balm, known in North America as "Oswego tea," which produces an excellent beverage. Finally, that day, after searching carefully, the two hunters arrived at the true location of the warren. The ground there was riddled with holes, like a sieve.

"Burns!" cried Harbert.

— Yes, replied the reporter, I can see them clearly.

— But are they inhabited?

"That's the question."

The problem was quickly solved. Almost immediately, hundreds of small, rabbit-like animals scattered in all directions, with such speed that even Top himself couldn't have outrun them. Hunters and dog ran as fast as they could, but the rodents easily eluded them. The reporter, however, was determined not to leave until he had captured at least half a dozen of these quadrupeds. He wanted to stock the pantry with them first, and then domesticate any that were caught later. With a few snares set at the entrances to the burrows, the operation was sure to succeed. But at the moment, there were no snares, nor the means to make them. So, they had to resign themselves to searching each burrow, probing it with sticks, and patiently doing what could not be done otherwise. Finally, after an hour of searching, four rodents were caught

in their burrows. These were rabbits quite similar to their European counterparts, and which are commonly known as "American rabbits."

The spoils of the hunt were brought back to Granite House and featured at the evening meal. The inhabitants of this warren were not to be scorned, for they were delicious. This was a valuable resource for the colony, and one that seemed likely to be inexhaustible.

On May 31st, the partitions were finished. All that remained was to furnish the rooms, a task that would occupy the long winter days. A fireplace was installed in the first room, which served as a kitchen. The flue intended to carry the smoke outside provided some work for the impromptu chimney sweeps. It seemed simpler to Cyrus Smith to make it out of clay brick; since it was out of the question to vent it through the top shelf, a hole was cut in the granite above the kitchen window, and it was to this hole that the flue, angled obliquely, terminated like that of a sheet-metal stove. Perhaps, indeed probably, in the strong east winds that beat directly against the facade, the chimney would smoke, but these winds were rare, and besides, Master Nab, the cook, didn't pay them much attention.

Once these internal alterations were completed, the engineer set about blocking the opening of the old spillway that led to the lake, thus preventing any access through it. Blocks of rock were rolled into the

opening and securely cemented. Cyrus Smith had not yet realized his plan to flood this opening with the lake's waters by damming them back to their original level. He contented himself with concealing the obstruction using grasses, shrubs, or brush, which were planted in the crevices of the rocks and which the following spring would grow exuberantly.

However, he used the spillway in such a way as to bring a trickle of fresh water from the lake to the new dwelling. A small channel, cut below their level, produced this result, and this diversion from a pure and inexhaustible source yielded a yield of twenty-five to thirty gallons per day.

Water was therefore never to be lacking at Granite-House. Finally, everything was finished, and it was about time, as the bad weather was approaching. Thick shutters were used to close the windows on the facade, until the engineer had had time to manufacture window glass.

Gideon Spilett had very artistically arranged, in the protrusions of the rock, around the windows, plants of various species, as well as long floating grasses, and, in this way, the openings were framed with picturesque greenery of a charming effect.

The inhabitants of the solid, healthy and safe dwelling could therefore only be delighted with their work.

The windows allowed their gaze to extend over a limitless horizon, which was closed off by the two capes Mandibule to the north and cape Griffe to the south.

The entire Union Bay unfolded magnificently before them. Yes, these brave settlers had reason to be satisfied, and Pencroff was not sparing in his praise for what he humorously called "his apartment on the fifth floor above the mezzanine!"

CHAPTER XX

The winter season truly began this June, which corresponds to December in the Northern Hemisphere. It started with relentless downpours and gales. The guests of Granite-House were able to appreciate the advantages of a home untouched by the elements.

The shelter at the Chimneys would have been truly inadequate against the rigors of winter, and there was a real risk that the high tides, driven by the offshore winds, would once again breach it. Cyrus Smith even took some precautions, in anticipation of this eventuality, to preserve, as much as possible, the forge and the furnaces installed there.

Throughout June, time was spent on various tasks, including hunting and fishing, and the storehouse's reserves were well replenished.

Pencroff, whenever he had the leisure, intended to set traps from which he expected great success. He had made snares from wood fibers, and not a day went by without the warren yielding its share of rodents. Nab spent almost all his time salting or smoking meats, which ensured him excellent preserves.

The question of clothing was then discussed very seriously. The colonists had no other clothes than those they were wearing when the balloon dropped them on the island. These clothes were warm and sturdy; they had taken extreme care of them, as well as their linen, and kept them perfectly clean, but all of this would soon need replacing. Furthermore, if the winter was harsh, the colonists would suffer greatly from the cold.

In this respect, Cyrus Smith's ingenuity failed him. He had to deal with the most urgent needs: building the shelter, securing food, and the cold could catch him by surprise before the question of clothing was resolved. He therefore had to resign himself to getting through this first winter without too much complaint.

When the good season came, a serious hunt would be carried out for these mouflons, whose presence had been reported during the exploration at Mount Franklin, and, once the wool was harvested, the

engineer would know how to make warm and strong fabrics... How? he would think about it.

"Well, we'll just have to roast our calves at Granite-House!" said Pencroff. "Fuel is plentiful, and there's no reason to skimp on it."

“Besides,” replied Gideon Spilett, “Lincoln Island is not situated at a very high latitude, and it is likely that the winters there are not harsh. Didn’t you tell us, Cyrus, that this thirty-fifth parallel corresponds to that of Spain in the other hemisphere?”

“No doubt,” replied the engineer, “but some winters are very cold in Spain! Snow and ice abound, and Lincoln Island can be just as severely affected. However, it is an island, and as such, I hope the temperature there will be more moderate.”

"And why is that, Mr. Cyrus?" asked Harbert.

— Because the sea, my child, can be considered an immense reservoir, in which the heat of the summer is stored. When winter comes, it releases this heat, which ensures that the regions near the oceans have an average temperature that is lower in summer, but not as low in winter.

“We shall see,” replied Pencroff. “I ask that you not worry too much about whether or not it will be cold. What is certain is that the days are

already short and the evenings long. Let’s consider the question of lighting.”

"Nothing could be easier," replied Cyrus Smith.

"To be dealt with?" asked the sailor.

— To be resolved.

— And when will we begin?

— Tomorrow, by organizing a seal hunt.

— To make candles?

— Well then! Pencroff, of the candle.”

Such was, in fact, the engineer's project; a feasible project, since he had lime and sulfuric acid, and the amphibians of the islet would provide him with the fat necessary for its manufacture.

It was June 4th. It was Pentecost Sunday, and there was unanimous agreement to observe the holiday. All work was suspended, and prayers rose to heaven. But these prayers were now expressions of thanksgiving. The settlers of Lincoln Island were no longer the wretched castaways cast ashore. They no longer asked for anything; they gave thanks.

The next day, June 5th, in rather uncertain weather, we set off for the islet. We had to take advantage of the low tide to ford the channel, and,

in this regard, it was agreed that we would build, as best we could, a canoe which would make communications easier, and would also allow us to go up the Mercy, during the great exploration of the southwest of the island, which was postponed until the first good weather.

The seals were numerous, and the hunters, armed with their iron-tipped spears, easily killed half a dozen. Nab and Pencroff skinned them, bringing back to Granite-House only their blubber and their hides, the latter to be used for making sturdy shoes.

The result of this hunt was this: about three hundred pounds of grease which was to be used entirely in the manufacture of candles.

The operation was extremely simple, and, if it did not yield absolutely perfect products, they were at least usable. Cyrus Smith could have had only sulfuric acid at his disposal, and by heating this acid with neutral fats—in this case, seal fat—he could have isolated the glycerin; then, from the new compound, he could easily have separated the olein, margarine, and stearin using boiling water. But, in order to simplify the operation, he preferred to saponify the fat with lime.

In this way, he obtained a calcareous soap, easily decomposed by sulfuric acid, which precipitated the lime in its sulfate form and released the fatty acids. Of these three acids—oleic, margaric, and stearic—the first, being liquid, was expelled by sufficient pressure. As

for the other two, they formed the very substance that would be used to mold the candles.

The operation lasted no more than twenty-four hours.

After several trials, the wicks were made of plant fibers, and, dipped in the liquefied substance, they formed true stearic candles, hand-molded, lacking only bleaching and polishing. They did not, of course, offer the advantage that wicks impregnated with boric acid have of vitrifying as they burn and consuming themselves completely; but since Cyrus Smith had made a fine pair of snuffers, these candles were greatly appreciated during the evenings at Granite House.

Throughout that month, there was no shortage of work inside the new house. The carpenters were kept busy. The tools, which had been quite rudimentary, were improved and supplemented. Scissors, among other things, were made, and the colonists could finally cut their hair, and if not grow their beards, at least trim them to their liking.

Harbert had none, Nab had hardly any, but their companions had so many that they justified the making of said scissors.

The manufacture of a handsaw, of the kind called a handsaw, cost endless effort, but finally an instrument was obtained which, when vigorously handled, could divide the wood fibers of the wood.

So they made tables, chairs, and wardrobes to furnish the main rooms, and bed frames, the bedding for which consisted entirely of eelgrass mattresses. The kitchen, with its planks on which rested the earthenware utensils, its brick stove, and its washing stone, had a very pleasant air, and Nab worked there gravely, as if he were in a chemist's laboratory.

But the carpenters soon had to be replaced by joiners. Indeed, the new spillway, created by blasting, necessitated the construction of two culverts, one on the Grande-vue plateau, the other on the beach itself.

Now, indeed, the plateau and the shore were bisected by a stream that had to be crossed to reach the north of the island. To avoid it, the settlers would have been forced to make a considerable detour and travel westward as far as the source of Red Creek. The simplest solution, therefore, was to build two culverts, twenty to twenty-five feet long, across the plateau and the shore, using only a few trees, hewn with axes, to form their entire framework. This was completed in a few days. With the bridges built, Nab and Pencroff then took the opportunity to go to the oyster bed that had been discovered offshore from the dunes. They had hauled with them a kind of crude cart, which replaced the old, rather cumbersome hurdle, and they brought back several thousand oysters, which quickly acclimatized themselves

among the rocks that formed so many natural parks at the mouth of the Mercy River. These mollusks were of excellent quality, and the colonists consumed them almost daily.

As we can see, Lincoln Island, although its inhabitants had explored only a very small portion of it, already provided for almost all their needs. And it was probable that, if searched even in its most secret hiding places, throughout the wooded area stretching from Mercy Island to Reptile Point, it would yield new treasures. Only one deprivation still troubled the settlers of Lincoln Island. They did not lack nitrogenous food, nor the plant products that would temper its use; the woody roots of dragon trees, subjected to fermentation, gave them a sour drink, a kind of beer far preferable to pure water; they had even made sugar, without cane or beets, by collecting the liquor distilled from the "acer saccharinum," a type of maple in the Aceraceae family, which thrives in all mid-altitude zones, and of which the island possessed a great many; They made a very pleasant tea using the bee balm brought back from the warren; finally, they had plenty of salt, the only mineral product that enters into the diet..., but bread was lacking.

Perhaps later the colonists could replace this food with some equivalent, sago flour or breadfruit starch, and it was possible, in fact,

that the southern forests included these precious trees among their species, but until then they had not been encountered.

However, Providence had to come directly to the aid of the colonists in this circumstance, in an infinitesimal proportion, it is true, but finally Cyrus Smith, with all his intelligence, all his ingenuity, could never have produced what, by the greatest chance, Harbert found one day in the lining of his jacket, which he was busy mending.

That day — it was raining heavily — the colonists were gathered in the great hall of Granite House, when the young boy suddenly cried out:

"Here, Mr. Cyrus. A grain of wheat!"

And he showed his companions a grain, a single grain which, from his torn pocket, had made its way into the lining of his jacket.

The presence of this grain was explained by Harbert's habit, while in Richmond, of feeding some wood pigeons that Pencroff had given him.

"A grain of wheat?" the engineer replied quickly.

— Yes, Mr. Cyrus, but only one, just one!

"Well, my boy," cried Pencroff, smiling, "we've made a fine mess of things, haven't we! What on earth could we possibly do with a single grain of wheat?"

"We'll make bread out of it," replied Cyrus Smith.

"Bread, cakes, pies!" replied the sailor. "Come now! The bread this grain of wheat will provide won't suffocate us anytime soon!"

Harbert, attaching little importance to his discovery, was about to throw away the grain in question, but Cyrus Smith took it, examined it, recognized that it was in good condition, and, looking the sailor straight in the face:

"Pencroff," he asked him calmly, "do you know how many ears of wheat a grain of wheat can produce?"

"One, I suppose!" replied the sailor, surprised by the question.

— Ten, Pencroff. And do you know how many grains an ear of corn holds?

— Well, no.

“Eighty on average,” said Cyrus Smith. “So, if we plant this grain, at the first harvest we will reap eight hundred grains, which will produce six hundred and forty thousand at the second, five hundred and twelve million at the third, and more than four hundred billion grains at the fourth. That is the proportion.”

Cyrus Smith's companions listened without responding. These figures astonished them. They were accurate, however.

“Yes, my friends,” the engineer continued. “Such are the arithmetic progressions of fertile nature. And what is this multiplication of the grain of wheat, whose ear bears only eight hundred grains, compared to these poppy plants that bear thirty-two thousand seeds, to these tobacco plants that produce three hundred and sixty thousand? In a few years, without the numerous causes of destruction that halt their fertility, these plants would invade the whole earth.”

But the engineer had not finished his brief interrogation.

"And now, Pencroff," he continued, "do you know how many bushels four hundred billion grains represent?"

"No," replied the sailor, "but what I do know is that I am just a beast!"

— Well, that would be more than three million, at one hundred and thirty thousand per bushel, Pencroff.

"Three million!" exclaimed Pencroff.

— Three million.

— In four years?

"In four years," replied Cyrus Smith, "and even in two years, if, as I hope, we can obtain two harvests a year at this latitude."

To this, as was his custom, Pencroff felt he could respond with nothing other than a tremendous hurrah.

"So, Harbert," added the engineer, "you have made a discovery of extreme importance to us. Everything, my friends, everything can be useful to us in the conditions we are in. Please, do not forget it."

"No, Mr. Cyrus, no, we will not forget it," replied Pencroff, "and if I ever find one of those tobacco seeds, which multiply by three hundred and sixty thousand, I assure you I will not throw it to the wind! And now, do you know what we have left to do?"

"We still have to plant this seed," replied Harbert.

— Yes, added Gideon Spilett, and with all due respect, for he carries within him our future harvests.

"As long as it grows!" cried the sailor.

"It will grow," replied Cyrus Smith.

It was June 20th. The moment was therefore ripe for sowing this single, precious grain of wheat. Initially, there was talk of planting it in a pot; but, after some thought, it was decided to rely more directly on nature and entrust it to the earth. This was done that very day, and it goes without saying that every precaution was taken to ensure the operation's success.

The weather having cleared slightly, the settlers climbed the heights of Granite House. There, on the plateau, they chose a spot well sheltered

from the wind, and where the midday sun would pour its full heat. The place was cleared, carefully weeded, even searched to drive out any insects or worms; a layer of good soil amended with a little lime was laid on top; it was surrounded by a palisade; then, the grain was pressed into the damp layer.

Didn't it seem as if these colonists were laying the first stone of a building? This reminded Pencroff of the day he had lit his only match, and all the care he had taken in that operation. But this time, the matter was more serious. Indeed, the shipwrecked men would always have managed to procure a fire, one way or another, but no human power could recreate that grain of wheat for them if, by misfortune, it were to perish!

CHAPTER XXI

From that moment on, not a single day passed without Pencroff going to visit what he seriously called his "wheat field." And woe to the insects that ventured there! They had no mercy to expect.

Towards the end of June, after endless rains, the weather turned decidedly cold, and on the 29th, a Fahrenheit thermometer would certainly have shown only twenty degrees above zero (6.67 degrees Celsius below ice).

The next day, June 30th, which corresponds to December 31st in the Northern Hemisphere year, was a Friday. Nab remarked that the year ended on a bad day; but Pencroff replied that, naturally, the other began on a good one—which was better. In any case, it began with a very sharp cold. Ice floes piled up at the mouth of the Mercy River, and the lake soon froze over completely.

The fuel supply had to be replenished several times. Pencroff hadn't waited for the river to freeze over before driving enormous rafts of timber to their destination. The current was an indefatigable engine, and it was used to carry the driftwood until the cold finally brought it to a halt. In addition to the fuel so abundantly provided by the forest, several cartloads of coal were also brought in, which had to be fetched from the foothills of Mount Franklin. This powerful heat from the coal was greatly appreciated by the low temperature, which, on July 4th, dropped to eight degrees Fahrenheit (13 degrees Celsius below zero). A second fireplace had been built in the dining room, and there, they worked together.

During this cold period, Cyrus Smith had only to congratulate himself on having diverted a small trickle of water from Grant Lake to Granite House. Taken below the frozen surface, then carried by the old spillway, they retained their liquidity and arrived at an indoor reservoir, which

had been dug at the corner of the back store, and whose overflow escaped through the well to the sea.

Around this time, the weather being extremely dry, the colonists, dressed as well as they could be, resolved to dedicate a day to exploring the southeastern part of the island between Mercy and Cape Claw. It was a vast marshy area, and there might be some good hunting to be done, as waterfowl were expected to be plentiful there.

It was eight or nine miles each way, and consequently, the day would be well spent. As it also involved exploring an unknown portion of the island, the entire colony had to take part. Therefore, on July 5th, at six o'clock in the morning, as dawn was barely breaking, Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Nab, and Pencroff, armed with spears, snares, bows and arrows, and with sufficient provisions, left Granite House, preceded by Top, who skipped ahead of them.

We took the shortest route, and the shortest route was to cross the Mercy on the ice floes that were then blocking it.

"But," the reporter rightly observed, "that cannot replace a proper bridge!" Thus, the construction of a "proper" bridge was noted in the series of upcoming projects.

It was the first time that the settlers had set foot on the right bank of the Mercy, and ventured among those tall and magnificent conifers,

then covered in snow.

But they had not gone half a mile when, from a thicket, a whole family of quadrupeds escaped, having taken up residence there, and whose barking caused Top to flee.

"Ah! They look like foxes!" cried Harbert, when he saw the whole gang scatter as fast as he could.

They were foxes, indeed, but very large foxes, which made a kind of barking sound, which greatly surprised Top himself, for he stopped his pursuit and gave these swift animals time to disappear.

The dog had every right to be surprised, since he didn't know anything about natural history. But by their barking, these foxes, reddish-gray in coat, with black tails ending in white tufts, had revealed their origin. So, without hesitation, Harbert gave them their true name: "culpeux." These culpeux are frequently found in Chile, the Falkland Islands, and throughout those American regions crossed by the 30th and 40th parallels. Harbert greatly regretted that Top hadn't been able to capture one of these carnivores.

"Is this edible?" asked Pencroff, who never considered representatives of the island's fauna except from a special point of view.

"No," replied Harbert, "but zoologists have not yet determined whether the pupil of these foxes is diurnal or nocturnal, and whether it

should not be appropriate to classify them in the genus *canine* proper."

Cyrus Smith couldn't help but smile at the young boy's remark, which revealed a serious mind. As for the sailor, as long as these foxes weren't edible, he didn't mind. However, he pointed out that when a farmyard was established at Granite House, it would be wise to take some precautions against the likely visit of these four-legged raiders. No one disputed this.

After rounding the tip of the wreck, the colonists found a long beach lapped by the vast sea. It was then eight o'clock in the morning. The sky was very clear, as often happens during prolonged periods of extreme cold; but, warmed by their run, Cyrus Smith and his companions did not feel the chill of the atmosphere too keenly.

Moreover, there was no wind, a circumstance that made the sharp drops in temperature infinitely more bearable. A bright sun, though without any heat, was rising from the ocean, its enormous disk swaying on the horizon. The sea formed a tranquil, blue expanse like that of a Mediterranean gulf on a clear day. Cape Griffe, curved like a yataghan, tapered sharply about four miles to the southeast. To the left, the edge of the marsh was abruptly halted by a small point that the sun's rays then outlined with a fiery streak.

Indeed, in this part of Union Bay, completely exposed to the open sea, not even a sandbar, ships battered by easterly winds would have found no shelter. The tranquility of the sea, its waters undisturbed by any shoal, its uniform color untainted by any yellowish tint, and the complete absence of any reef, all suggested that this coast was steep and that the ocean there covered deep abysses. Further west, at a distance of four miles, lay the first tree lines of the Far West forests. One might have thought oneself, so to speak, on the desolate coast of some Antarctic island overrun by icebergs. The colonists stopped there for lunch. A fire of brushwood and dried seaweed was lit, and Nab prepared a cold meat lunch, to which he added a few cups of Oswego tea.

While eating, we watched. This part of Lincoln Island was truly barren and contrasted sharply with the rest of the western region. This led the reporter to reflect that if chance had initially cast the shipwrecked sailors ashore on this beach, they would have formed a deplorable opinion of their future home.

“I don’t even think we could have reached it,” replied the engineer, “because the sea is deep, and it didn’t offer us a single rock to take refuge on. Off Granite House, at least, there were sandbanks, an islet,

which increased our chances of safety. Here, there's nothing but the abyss!"

"It is quite remarkable," observed Gideon Spilett, "that this relatively small island should have such varied soil. This diversity of appearance logically belongs only to continents of a certain size. It truly seems as if the western part of Lincoln Island, so rich and fertile, is bathed by the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and that its northern and southeastern shores extend into a kind of Arctic sea."

"You are right, my dear Spilett," replied Cyrus Smith, "it is an observation I have made as well. This island, in its form as in its nature, I find strange. It seems to be a summary of all the aspects that a continent presents, and I would not be surprised if it had once been a continent."

— What! A continent in the middle of the Pacific? exclaimed Pencroff.

"Why not?" replied Cyrus Smith. "Why should Australia, New Ireland, all that English geographers call Australasia, together with the Pacific archipelagos, not have once formed a sixth part of the world, as important as Europe or Asia, Africa or the two Americas? My mind does not refuse to admit that all the islands, emerging from this vast Ocean, are but peaks of a continent now submerged, but which dominated the waters in prehistoric times."

"Just as Atlantis once was," replied Harbert.

— Yes, my child... if she existed, though.

"And Lincoln Island would have been part of that continent?" asked Pencroff.

"That's likely," replied Cyrus Smith, "and that would explain quite a bit of the diversity of production that can be seen on its surface."

"And the considerable number of animals that still inhabit it," added Harbert.

“Yes, my child,” replied the engineer, “and you provide me with a new argument in support of my thesis. It is certain, from what we have seen, that animals are numerous on the island, and, what is more strange, that the species are extremely varied. There is a reason for this, and for me, it is that Lincoln Island may once have been part of some vast continent that gradually sank below the Pacific.”

"So, one fine day," replied Pencroff, who did not seem entirely convinced, "what remains of this ancient continent could disappear in turn, and there will be nothing left between America and Asia?"

"Yes," replied Cyrus Smith, "there will be new continents, which billions upon billions of tiny animals are working to build right now."

"And who are these masons?" asked Pencroff.

“The infusoria of coral,” replied Cyrus Smith. “It is they who, through continuous work, created Clermont-Tonnerre Island, the atolls, and the many other coral islands in the Pacific Ocean. It takes forty-seven million of these infusoria to weigh a grain, and yet, with the sea salts they absorb and the solid elements of the water they assimilate, these tiny creatures produce limestone, and this limestone forms enormous underwater substructures, whose hardness and solidity equal those of granite. In the early days of creation, nature, using fire, produced the land by uplift; but now it charges microscopic animals with replacing this agent, whose dynamic power within the globe has evidently diminished—as evidenced by the large number of volcanoes now extinct on the Earth's surface.” And I truly believe that, as centuries succeed centuries and infusoria succeed infusoria, this Pacific may one day transform into a vast continent, which new generations will inhabit and civilize in their turn.

— It will be long! said Pencroff.

"Nature has time on its side," replied the engineer.

"But what good are new continents?" asked Harbert. "It seems to me that the current extent of habitable lands is sufficient for humanity. And nature does nothing in vain."

“Nothing useless, indeed,” the engineer continued, “but here is how one might explain the need for new continents in the future, and precisely in this tropical zone occupied by coral islands. At least, this explanation seems plausible to me.”

"We are listening, Mr. Cyrus," replied Harbert.

— Here is my thought: scientists generally agree that one day our globe will end, or rather that animal and plant life will no longer be possible on it, due to the intense cooling it will undergo. What they disagree on is the cause of this cooling. Some believe it will stem from the drop in temperature the sun will experience after millions of years; others, from the gradual extinction of our globe's internal fires, which have a more pronounced influence on it than is generally supposed. I, for one, favor the latter hypothesis, based on the fact that the moon is indeed a cooled celestial body, which is no longer habitable, even though the sun continues to pour the same amount of heat onto its surface. If, therefore, the moon has cooled, it is because these internal fires, to which it, like all the celestial bodies of the stellar world, owed its origin, have been completely extinguished. Finally, whatever the cause, our planet will one day cool down, but this cooling will only occur gradually. What will happen then? Temperate zones, in the more or less distant future, will be no more habitable than the polar regions

are now. Therefore, human populations, like animal groups, will retreat to latitudes more directly influenced by the sun. A massive migration will take place. Europe, Central Asia, and North America will gradually be abandoned, as will Australasia and the lowlands of South America. Vegetation will follow the human migration. Flora will retreat toward the equator along with fauna. The central parts of South America and Africa will become the most inhabited continents. The Sami and Samoyeds will find the climatic conditions of the polar sea on the shores of the Mediterranean. Who is to say that, at that time, the equatorial regions will not be too small to contain and feed humanity? Now, why should provident nature, in order to provide refuge for all plant and animal migration, not lay the foundations of a new continent right now, beneath the equator, and charge the infusoria with its construction? I have often reflected on all these things, my friends, and I firmly believe that the appearance of our globe will one day be completely transformed, that, as a result of the rise of new continents, the seas will cover the old ones, and that, in future centuries, Columbuses will discover the islands of Chimborazo, the Himalayas, or Mont Blanc, remnants of a submerged America, Asia, and Europe. Then, finally, these new continents, in turn, will themselves become uninhabitable; The heat will die out like the heat of a body whose soul

has just departed, and life will disappear, if not definitively from the globe, at least momentarily. Perhaps, then, our spheroid will rest, will renew itself in death to be resurrected one day in superior conditions! But all this, my friends, is the secret of the Author of all things, and, concerning the work of the infusoria, I have perhaps allowed myself to be led a little too far astray in scrutinizing the secrets of the future.

"My dear Cyrus," replied Gideon Spilett, "these theories are prophecies to me, and they will one day be fulfilled."

"That's God's secret," said the engineer.

"All that is well and good," said Pencroff, who had been listening intently, "but will you tell me, Mr. Cyrus, whether Lincoln Island was built by your infusoria?"

"No," replied Cyrus Smith, "it is purely of volcanic origin."

— So, will she disappear one day?

— That's likely.

— I certainly hope we won't be there again.

— No, rest assured, Pencroff, we won't be there anymore, since we have no desire to die there and we may end up getting out of it.

“In the meantime,” replied Gideon Spilett, “let’s settle in as if for eternity. One should never do anything halfway.”

This ended the conversation. Lunch was over. Exploration resumed, and the colonists reached the edge of the marshy region.

It was indeed a marsh, whose extent, extending to the rounded coast that marked the southeastern end of the island, might have measured twenty square miles. The soil was composed of a clayey-siliceous silt, mixed with numerous plant debris. It was covered with sea purslane, rushes, sedges, bulrushes, and here and there, layers of grass, as thick as a heavy carpet. Several icy pools sparkled in many places under the sun's rays. Neither rain nor any river, swollen by a sudden flood, had been able to create these water reserves. One naturally had to conclude that this marsh was fed by seepage from the soil, and this was indeed the case. It was even to be feared that the air there, during the heat of summer, might become laden with those miasmas that cause malarial fevers. Above the aquatic grasses, on the surface of the stagnant waters, fluttered a world of birds.

Hunters in the marsh and professional hut keepers could not have lost a single shot.

Wild ducks—pintails, teals, and snipe—lived there in flocks, and these fearless birds allowed themselves to be easily approached. A shot from a shotgun would certainly have hit several dozen of these birds, so dense were their ranks. They had to be content with shooting them

with arrows. The result was less impressive, but the silent arrow had the advantage of not frightening these birds, which the detonation of a firearm would have scattered to every corner of the marsh. The hunters were therefore content, for this occasion, with a dozen ducks, white-bodied with a cinnamon-colored band, green heads, black, white, and russet wings, and flattened bills, which Harbert recognized as shelducks.

Top skillfully contributed to the capture of these birds, whose name was given to this marshy part of the island. The settlers thus had an abundant reserve of waterfowl. When the time came, it would simply be a matter of exploiting it properly, and it was likely that several species of these birds could be, if not domesticated, at least acclimatized to the area around the lake, making them more readily available to consumers.

Around five o'clock in the evening, Cyrus Smith and his companions resumed their journey home, crossing the Tadorn's-fens marsh, and they crossed the Mercy again on the ice bridge.

By eight o'clock in the evening, everyone had returned to Granite-House.

CHAPTER XXII

These intense cold spells lasted until August 15th, though they did not exceed the maximum Fahrenheit recorded up to that point. When the atmosphere was calm, the low temperature was easily bearable; but when the north wind blew, it seemed harsh to those who were insufficiently dressed. Pencroff was beginning to wish that Lincoln Island had provided refuge for a few families of bears, rather than for these foxes or seals, whose fur left much to be desired.

"Bears," he said, "are generally well dressed, and I would be happy to borrow their warm coat for the winter.

"But," Nab replied, laughing, "perhaps those bears wouldn't agree, Pencroff, to give you their coats. They're no Saint-Martins, those beasts!"

"We would force them, Nab, we would force them," replied Pencroff in a completely authoritative tone. But these formidable carnivores did not exist on the island, or at least, they had not shown themselves until then.

However, Harbert, Pencroff, and the reporter set about setting traps on the Grande-vue plateau and near the forest. According to the sailor, any animal, whatever it might be, would be a good catch, and rodents or carnivores that tested the new traps would be well received at Granite-House.

These traps were, moreover, extremely simple: pits dug in the ground, covered with branches and grass to conceal the opening, and at the bottom some bait whose scent might attract animals—that was all. It must also be said that they had not been dug haphazardly, but in certain places where more numerous tracks indicated frequent passage of quadrupeds. They were checked daily, and on three occasions during the first few days, specimens of the culpables that had already been seen on the right bank of the Mercy were found there.

"Ah, well then! So there are only foxes in this country!" cried Pencroff, the third time he pulled one of these animals from the pit where he stood looking very sheepish. "Beasts that are good for nothing!"

"But yes," said Gideon Spilett. "They are good for something!"

— And to what end?

"To make bait to attract others!"

The reporter was right, and the traps were then primed with these fox carcasses.

The sailor had also made snares using the fibers of the curry-rush, and the snares proved more profitable than the traps. Rarely a day went by without some rabbit from the warren being caught. It was always rabbit, but Nab knew how to vary his sauces, and the guests never dreamed of complaining.

However, once or twice during the second week of August, the traps yielded animals other than culprits, and more useful ones. These were some of the wild boars that had already been reported north of the lake. Pencroff didn't need to ask if these animals were edible. It was obvious from their resemblance to American or European pigs.

"But they are not pigs," Harbert told him, "I warn you, Pencroff.

"My boy," replied the sailor, leaning over the hatch, and pulling out by the small appendage that served as its tail one of these representatives of the Suillian family, "let me believe that these are pigs!"

— And why?

— Because it makes me happy!

— So you like pork, Pencroff?

"I like pigs very much," replied the sailor, "especially for their feet, and if they had eight instead of four, I would like them twice as much!"

As for the animals in question, they were peccaries belonging to one of the four genera in the family, and they were even of the "tajassous" species, recognizable by their dark color and lack of the long canines that arm the mouths of their relatives. These peccaries usually live in herds, and it was likely that they were abundant in the wooded parts of

the island. In any case, they were edible from head to toe, and Pencroff asked nothing more of them.

Around August 15th, the atmospheric conditions changed suddenly due to a sudden shift in wind from the northwest.

The temperature rose a few degrees, and the vapors that had accumulated in the air soon turned to snow. The entire island was covered in a white blanket, revealing itself to its inhabitants in a new light. This snow fell heavily for several days, and its depth soon reached two feet.

The wind soon grew extremely violent, and from the top of Granite House, the sea could be heard roaring on the reefs. At certain angles, there were rapid eddies of air, and the snow, forming in tall, swirling columns, resembled those waterspouts that pirouette on their base, and which ships attack with cannon fire.

However, the hurricane, coming from the northwest, was taking the island from the rear, and Granite House's orientation protected it from a direct assault. But in the midst of this blizzard, as terrible as if it had occurred in some polar region, neither Cyrus Smith nor his companions, despite their desire, could venture outside, and they remained confined for five days, from August 20th to 25th. The storm could be heard roaring in the Jacamar woods, which were bound to

suffer. Many trees would undoubtedly be uprooted, but Pencroff consoled himself with the thought that he would not have the trouble of cutting them down.

"The wind is acting like a lumberjack, let it do its thing," he kept repeating.

And, besides, there would have been no way to prevent it.

How grateful the inhabitants of Granite House must have been for providing them with such a solid and unshakeable refuge! Cyrus Smith certainly deserved his share of the thanks, but after all, it was nature that had carved out this vast cavern, and he had merely discovered it. There, they were all safe, and the storm's blows could not reach them. If they had built a house of brick and wood on the plateau of Grande-vue, it certainly would not have withstood the fury of that hurricane. As for the Chimneys, the sheer roar of the waves alone would have led one to believe they were utterly uninhabitable, for the sea, passing over the islet, must have battered them fiercely. But here, at Granite House, in the midst of this massif, against which neither water nor air could penetrate, there was nothing to fear.

During those few days of confinement, the colonists were not idle. Wood, cut into planks, was plentiful in the storehouse, and little by little, they added tables and chairs—certainly sturdy pieces, for no

expense was spared. These somewhat heavy furnishings hardly lived up to their name, which emphasizes mobility, but they were a source of pride for Nab and Pencroff, who wouldn't have traded them for Boule's furniture.

Then the carpenters became basket makers, and they did quite well in this new craft. Near the northern tip of the lake, a fertile osier bed had been discovered, where purple willows grew in great numbers. Before the rainy season, Pencroff and Harbert had harvested these useful shrubs, and their branches, now well separated, could be put to good use. The first attempts were clumsy, but thanks to the skill and ingenuity of the workers, who consulted one another, recalled the models they had seen, and competed with each other, baskets and hampers of various sizes soon increased the colony's stock. The storehouse was stocked, and Nab enclosed his harvests of rhizomes, pine nuts, and dragon tree roots in special baskets.

During the last week of August, the weather changed once again. The temperature dropped a little, and the storm subsided. The settlers ventured outside. There was certainly two feet of snow on the shore, but on the surface of this hardened snow, one could walk without too much difficulty. Cyrus Smith and his companions climbed onto the Grande-vue plateau. What a change! The woods they had left verdant,

especially in the nearby section dominated by conifers, now disappeared beneath a uniform white. Everything was white, from the summit of Mount Franklin to the shoreline: the forests, the meadow, the lake, the river, the beaches.

The waters of the Mercy River flowed beneath an ice arch that, with each ebb and flow, broke away and shattered with a crash. Numerous birds fluttered across the solid surface of the lake: ducks and snipe, pintails and guillemots. There were thousands of them. The rocks between which the waterfall cascaded at the edge of the plateau bristled with ice. It looked as if the water were gushing from a monstrous gargoyle, sculpted with all the imagination of a Renaissance artist. As for assessing the damage done to the forest by the hurricane, it was still impossible, and one had to wait until the immense white blanket had dissipated.

Gideon Spilett, Pencroff and Harbert did not miss this opportunity to visit their traps.

They didn't find them easily, buried under the snow. They even had to be careful not to fall into either one, which would have been both dangerous and humiliating: falling into their own trap! But finally, they avoided this unpleasantness and found the traps perfectly intact. No animal had fallen in, and yet, there were numerous tracks in the

surrounding area, including some very distinct claw marks. Harbert didn't hesitate to assert that some carnivore of the feline type had passed by, which justified the engineer's opinion about the presence of dangerous beasts on Lincoln Island. No doubt, these beasts usually inhabited the dense forests of the Far West, but, driven by hunger, they had ventured as far as the Grande-vue plateau. Perhaps they sensed the presence of the inhabitants of Granite-House?

"So, what exactly are these felines?" asked Pencroff.

"They are tigers," replied Harbert.

— I thought those creatures were only found in hot countries?

"On the New World," replied the young boy, "they are observed from Mexico to the Pampas of Buenos Aires. Now, since Lincoln Island is at roughly the same latitude as the provinces of La Plata, it is not surprising that some tigers are found there."

"Well, we'll keep an eye on things," replied Pencroff.

However, the snow eventually melted as the temperature rose. Rain began to fall, and its dissolving action washed away the white layer. Despite the bad weather, the colonists replenished their supplies of all kinds: pine nuts, dragon tree roots, rhizomes, and maple liquor for the plant-based items; and wild rabbits, agoutis, and kangaroos for the animal-based items. This required several excursions into the forest,

and it was discovered that a number of trees had been felled by the recent hurricane. The sailor and Nab even drove the wagon as far as the coal seam to bring back a few tons of fuel. They noticed in passing that the pottery kiln's chimney had been badly damaged by the wind and had been stripped of at least six feet. Along with the coal, the wood supply at Granite House was also replenished, and the Mercy River's current, now free-flowing, was used to bring in several trainloads. It was possible that the period of extreme cold was not yet over. A visit had also been made to the Chimneys, and the settlers could only congratulate themselves for not having remained there during the storm. The sea had left undeniable marks of its devastation.

Carried by the offshore winds and leaping over the islet, it had violently assaulted the passages, which were half-buried in sand, and thick layers of seaweed covered the rocks. While Nab, Harbert, and Pencroff hunted or replenished the fuel supplies, Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett worked to clear the Chimneys, and they found the forge and furnaces almost intact, protected as they had been initially by the accumulation of sand.

The fuel supply had not been replenished in vain. The colonists were not yet done with the harsh cold. It is well known that, in the Northern Hemisphere, February is characterized primarily by significant drops in

temperature. The same was to be true in the Southern Hemisphere, and the end of August, which is February in North America, was no exception to this climatic phenomenon.

Around the 25th, after another alternation of snow and rain, the wind shifted to the southeast, and suddenly the cold became extremely intense. According to the engineer's estimate, the mercury column of a Fahrenheit thermometer would not have been less than eight degrees below zero (22 degrees Celsius below freezing), and this intensity of cold, made even more painful by a sharp north wind, persisted for several days. The colonists were once again forced to take shelter in Granite House, and, as it was necessary to seal all the openings in the facade airtight, leaving only the bare minimum for air circulation, the consumption of candles was considerable.

To conserve fuel, the colonists often relied solely on the flames of their hearths for light, burning no expense on the fire. Several times, some ventured down to the shore amidst the ice floes piled up by the tide, but they soon returned to Granite House, their hands clinging to the ladder rungs with considerable difficulty and pain. The intense cold burned their fingers.

It was still necessary to occupy the leisure time that sequestration afforded the guests of Granite-House.

Cyrus Smith then undertook an operation that could be carried out behind closed doors.

We know that the colonists had no other sugar at their disposal than this liquid substance, which they extracted from maple trees by making deep incisions. They simply collected this sap in vessels and used it in this state for various culinary purposes, all the more so because, as it aged, the sap tended to whiten and take on a syrupy consistency.

But there was a better thing to do, and one day Cyrus Smith announced to his companions that they were going to become refiners.

"Refiners!" replied Pencroff. "It's a rather risky business, I think?"

"Very hot!" replied the engineer.

"Then it will be in season!" replied the sailor.

Let the word "refining" not conjure up images of those factories, complicated with their machinery and workers. No! To crystallize this liquid, it was enough to purify it by an extremely simple operation. Placed over the fire in large earthenware vessels, it was simply subjected to a certain amount of evaporation, and soon a foam rose to its surface. As soon as it began to thicken, Nab took care to stir it with a wooden spatula—which would accelerate its evaporation and prevent it from developing an empyreumatic taste.

After a few hours of boiling over a good fire, which was as beneficial to the workers as it was to the substance being processed, the substance had transformed into a thick syrup. This syrup was poured into clay molds, previously made in the kitchen oven itself, and given various shapes. The next day, this cooled syrup formed loaves and tablets. It was sugar, slightly reddish in color, but almost transparent and of perfect taste.

The cold continued until mid-September, and the prisoners of Granite House were beginning to find their captivity very long. Almost every day, they attempted short outings, but these could not be prolonged. They worked constantly on improving the house. They talked while they worked.

Cyrus Smith instructed his companions in all things, and he especially explained the practical applications of science. The colonists had no library at their disposal; but the engineer was a book always ready, always open to the page each needed, a book that answered all their questions and which they often consulted. Time passed in this way, and these good people seemed to have no fear for the future.

However, it was high time this confinement ended. Everyone was eager to see, if not the warmer weather, at least the end of this unbearable cold. If only they had been dressed warmly enough to brave

it, how many excursions they would have undertaken, either to the dunes or to the Shelduck Marsh! The game would have been easy to approach, and the hunt would certainly have been fruitful. But Cyrus Smith insisted that no one endanger his health, for he needed all the help he could get, and his advice was heeded.

But, it must be said, the most impatient of all during this confinement, after Pencroff, was Top. The faithful dog felt very cramped in Granite House. He paced from room to room, showing in his own way his boredom at being confined.

Cyrus Smith often noticed that when he approached the dark well, which connected to the sea and whose opening was at the back of the store, Top would make peculiar grunting noises. Top would circle around the hole, which had been covered with a wooden panel. Sometimes he would even try to slip his paws under the panel, as if he wanted to lift it.

He would then bark in a particular way, which indicated both anger and concern.

The engineer observed this behavior several times. What could it be in this abyss that could so impress the intelligent animal? The well led to the sea, that much was certain. Did it then branch out into narrow tunnels through the island's structure?

Was it connected to some other internal cavities? Did some sea monster occasionally come to breathe at the bottom of this well? The engineer didn't know what to think and couldn't help but dream of bizarre complications. Accustomed to delving deep into the realm of scientific realities, he couldn't forgive himself for allowing himself to be drawn into the strange and almost supernatural; but how could he explain that Top, one of those sensible dogs who have never wasted their time barking at the moon, persisted in probing this abyss with his sense of smell and hearing, if nothing was happening there to arouse his concern? Top's behavior intrigued Cyrus Smith more than he thought reasonable to admit to himself. In any case, the engineer only shared his impressions with Gideon Spilett, finding it pointless to share the involuntary thoughts that Top's perhaps mere whims sparked in his companions. Finally, the cold weather ended. There was rain, squalls mixed with snow, showers, and gales, but these storms were short-lived. The ice had melted, the snow had dissolved; the beach, the plateau, the banks of the Mercy, and the forest were once again passable. This return of spring delighted the guests of Granite House, and soon they spent only their hours sleeping and eating there.

There was a lot of hunting in the second half of September, which led Pencroff to demand with renewed insistence the firearms he claimed

had been promised by Cyrus Smith.

Knowing full well that without specialized equipment it would be nearly impossible to manufacture a useful rifle, he kept putting it off and postponing the operation. He also pointed out that Harbert and Gideon Spilett had become skilled archers, that all sorts of excellent game—agoutis, kangaroos, capybaras, pigeons, bustards, wild ducks, snipe, in short, game animals, both furred and feathered—fell beneath their arrows, and that, consequently, they could wait. But the stubborn sailor wouldn't hear of it, and he wouldn't let the engineer rest until he had satisfied his desire. Gideon Spilett, moreover, supported Pencroff.

"If the island, as one might doubt, he said, contains ferocious animals, we must think about fighting and exterminating them. A time may come when this will be our first duty."

But at that time, it wasn't the question of firearms that preoccupied Cyrus Smith, but rather that of clothing. The colonists' garments had survived the winter, but they wouldn't last until the following winter. Animal hides or ruminant wool were what they needed to obtain at all costs, and since mouflon sheep were plentiful, they needed to find a way to establish a herd to feed the colony. An enclosure for domestic animals, a poultry yard—in short, a kind of farm to be established somewhere on the island—these would be the two important projects

to undertake during the warmer months. Consequently, and with a view to these future settlements, it became urgent to push forward a reconnaissance in the whole unknown part of Lincoln Island, that is to say under those high forests which extended on the right bank of the Mercy, from its mouth to the end of the Serpentine Peninsula, as well as along the whole western coast.

But a certain amount of time was needed, and another month had to pass before this exploration could be usefully undertaken.

So they were waiting with a certain impatience, when an incident occurred, which further excited the settlers' desire to visit their entire domain.

It was October 24th. That day, Pencroff had gone to check the traps, which he always kept properly baited. In one of them, he found three animals that would be welcome at the office. It was a female peccary and her two young.

Pencroff therefore returned to Granite-House, delighted with his capture, and, as always, the sailor made a great show of his hunt.

"Come on! We'll have a fine meal, Mr. Cyrus!" he cried. "And you too, Mr. Spilett, you'll eat some!"

"I'd like to eat some," replied the reporter, "but what would I eat?"

— Suckling pig.

— Ah! Really, suckling pig, Pencroff? To hear you talk, I thought you were bringing back a truffled partridge!

"What?" exclaimed Pencroff. "Would you be ignoring the suckling pig, by any chance?"

"No," replied Gideon Spilett, without showing any enthusiasm, "and provided it is not abused..."

"That's all right, that's all right, Mr. Journalist," retorted the sailor, who didn't like to hear his hunt belittled. "Are you being difficult? And seven months ago, when we landed on the island, you would have been only too happy to encounter such game!"

"There you have it," replied the reporter. "Man is never perfect, nor content."

“Well,” Pencroff continued, “I hope Nab will distinguish himself. Look! These two little peccaries aren’t just three months old! They’ll be as tender as quail! Come on, Nab, let’s go! I’ll supervise the cooking myself.”

And the sailor, followed by Nab, went to the kitchen and became absorbed in his culinary tasks.

They let him do it his way. So Nab and he prepared a magnificent meal: the two little peccaries, kangaroo soup, smoked ham, pine nuts, dragon tree drink, Oswego tea—in short, everything that was best; but among all the dishes, the tasty peccaries, prepared in a stew, had to be the most important.

At five o'clock, dinner was served in the Granite House hall. The kangaroo soup was steaming on the table. It was found to be excellent. The soup was followed by peccaries, which Pencroff insisted on carving himself, and of which he served monstrous portions to each of the guests.

Those suckling pigs were truly delicious, and Pencroff was devouring his portion with superb enthusiasm, when suddenly a cry and a curse escaped him.

"What is it?" asked Cyrus Smith.

— I just broke a tooth! replied the sailor.

— Ah, so there are pebbles in your peccaries? said Gideon Spilett.

"One must believe it," replied Pencroff, removing from his lips the object that was costing him a jawbone!

It wasn't a pebble... It was a grain of lead.

PART 2

THE ABANDONED

CHAPTER I

Seven months had passed to the day since the balloon's passengers had been dropped on Lincoln Island. Since then, despite all their searching, no human being had appeared before them. Not a single wisp of smoke had betrayed the presence of man on the island's surface.

No manual labor had ever attested to its presence, neither in ancient times nor in recent times. Not only did it not appear to be inhabited, but one was led to believe that it had never been. And now, this entire edifice of deductions collapsed before a single grain of metal, found in the body of a harmless rodent!

The fact is, that pellet had come from a firearm, and who other than a human being could have used that weapon?

When Pencroff placed the lead pellet on the table, his companions looked at him with profound astonishment. All the consequences of this incident, considerable despite its apparent insignificance, had suddenly seized their minds.

The sudden appearance of a supernatural being could not have impressed them more vividly.

Cyrus Smith did not hesitate to begin by formulating the hypotheses that this surprising and unexpected fact should provoke. He took the lead pellet, turned it over and over, and felt it between his index finger and thumb. Then:

"Are you able to state," he asked Pencroff, "that the peccary, injured by this lead pellet, was barely three months old?"

"Hardly, Mr. Cyrus," replied Pencroff. "He was still suckling his mother when I found him in the pit."

— Well, said the engineer, this proves that, for three months at most, a gunshot has been fired on Lincoln Island.

— And that a grain of lead, added Gideon Spilett, struck, but not fatally, this small animal.

“That is beyond doubt,” continued Cyrus Smith, “and here are the consequences we must draw from this incident: either the island was

inhabited before our arrival, or men landed there no more than three months ago. Did these men arrive voluntarily or involuntarily, by landing or shipwreck? This point can only be determined later. As for who they are—European or Malay, enemy or friend of our race—nothing allows us to guess, and whether they still inhabit the island or have left, we know nothing more. But these questions concern us too directly for us to remain in uncertainty any longer.”

"No! A hundred times no! A thousand times no!" cried the sailor, rising from the table. "There are no other men but us on Lincoln Island! What the hell!"

The island is not large, and if it had been inhabited, we would have already seen some of its inhabitants!

"The opposite, indeed, would be very surprising," said Harbert.

"But it would be far more surprising, I suppose," observed the reporter, "if this peccary had been born with a grain of lead in its body!"

"Unless," Nab said seriously, "Pencroff had..."

“Look at that, Nab,” Pencroff retorted. “I’ve had a lead pellet in my jaw for the past five or six months without even realizing it!” “But where could it have been hiding?” added the sailor, opening his mouth wide to reveal the magnificent thirty-two teeth that adorned it. “Take a good

look, Nab, and if you find a hollow tooth in that rack, I'll give you permission to pull out half a dozen!"

"Nab's hypothesis is indeed inadmissible," replied Cyrus Smith, who, despite the gravity of his thoughts, could not suppress a smile. "It is certain that a shot was fired on the island within the last three months at most. But I would be inclined to admit that whoever has landed on this shore has only been there for a very short time or has only been passing through, for if, at the time we were exploring the island from Mount Franklin, it had been inhabited, we would have seen it or been seen. It is therefore probable that, only in the last few weeks, shipwrecked sailors have been cast ashore by a storm somewhere on the coast. In any case, it is important for us to be certain about this."

"I think we will have to act cautiously," said the reporter.

"That's my opinion," replied Cyrus Smith, "because it is unfortunately to be feared that it was Malay pirates who landed on the island!"

"Mr. Cyrus," asked the sailor, "wouldn't it be advisable, before going on our exploration, to build a canoe that would allow us either to go up the river, or if necessary to go around the coast? We mustn't let ourselves be caught unprepared."

"Your idea is good, Pencroff," replied the engineer, "but we can't wait. It would take at least a month to build a boat..."

"A proper canoe, yes," replied the sailor, "but we don't need a vessel designed to withstand the sea, and in five days at most, I can confidently build a canoe sufficient to navigate the Mercy."

"In five days," cried Nab, "build a boat?"

— Yes, Nab, a boat in the Indian style.

"Made of wood?" asked the black man, sounding unconvinced.

"Made of wood," replied Pencroff, "or rather, bark. I repeat, Mr. Cyrus, the matter can be resolved in five days!"

"In five days, then!" replied the engineer.

"But until then, we'd better be on our guard!" said Harbert.

“Very strictly, my friends,” replied Cyrus Smith, “and I would ask you to limit your hunting excursions to the vicinity of Granite House.”

Dinner ended less cheerfully than Pencroff had hoped.

Thus, the island was, or had been, inhabited by people other than the colonists. Since the lead pellet incident, this was now an indisputable fact, and such a revelation could only cause great anxiety among the colonists.

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett, before settling down to rest, talked at length about these things.

They wondered if, by chance, this incident might be connected with the inexplicable circumstances of the engineer's rescue and other strange peculiarities that had already struck them on several occasions. However, Cyrus Smith, after discussing the pros and cons of the matter, finally said:

"In short, do you want to know my opinion, my dear Spilett?"

— Yes, Cyrus.

"Well, here's the thing: no matter how thoroughly we explore the island, we won't find anything!"

The very next day, Pencroff set to work. The goal wasn't to build a canoe with frames and planking, but simply a flat-bottomed, floating craft that would be excellent for navigating the Mercy River, especially near its headwaters where the water was shallow. Pieces of bark, sewn together, would suffice to form the light vessel, and if, due to natural obstacles, a portage became necessary, it would be neither heavy nor cumbersome.

Pencroff planned to form the suture of the bark strips by means of riveted nails, and to ensure, with their adhesion, the perfect sealing of the device.

The challenge was therefore to choose trees whose bark, supple and tough, was suitable for this work.

As it happened, the last hurricane had felled a number of Douglas firs, which were perfectly suited to this type of construction. Some of these trees lay on the ground, and all that remained was to strip the bark from them, but this proved to be the most difficult part, given the imperfect tools available to the settlers. In short, they managed to complete the task.

While the sailor, assisted by the engineer, kept himself busy in this way, without wasting an hour, Gideon Spilett and Harbert were not idle. They had become the colony's suppliers. The reporter could not tire of admiring the young boy, who had acquired remarkable skill in handling the bow and spear.

Harbert also displayed great boldness, with much of that cool-headedness which one might rightly call "the reasoning of bravery." The two hunting companions, taking into account, moreover, the recommendations of Cyrus Smith, no longer went beyond a radius of two miles around Granite-House, but the first slopes of the forest provided a sufficient tribute of agoutis, capybaras, kangaroos, peccaries, etc., and if the yield of the traps was little since the cold had ceased, at least the warren gave its usual contingent, which could have fed the whole colony of Lincoln Island.

Often, during these hunts, Harbert would talk with Gideon Spilett about this incident with the lead pellet, and the conclusions the engineer had drawn from it, and one day—it was October 26—he said to him:

"But, Mr. Spilett, don't you find it very extraordinary that if some shipwrecked people have landed on this island, they have not yet shown themselves near Granite-House?

"Very surprising if they are still there," replied the reporter, "but not surprising at all if they are no longer there!"

"So you think those people have already left the island?" Harbert continued.

— That's more than likely, my boy, because if their stay there had been prolonged, and especially if they were still there, some incident would have eventually betrayed their presence.

"But if they were able to leave again," the young boy observed, "they weren't shipwrecked?"

— No, Harbert, or at least they were what I would call temporary castaways. It is quite possible, in fact, that a gust of wind threw them onto the island without disabling their boat, and that, once the gust had passed, they put back to sea.

"One thing must be admitted," said Harbert, "that Mr. Smith has always seemed to fear rather than desire the presence of human beings on our island."

— Indeed, replied the reporter, he can hardly imagine anyone but Malays frequenting these seas, and those gentlemen are bad scoundrels whom it is good to avoid.

"It is not impossible, Mr. Spilett," Harbert continued, "that we may one day find traces of their landing, and perhaps we will be able to settle the matter?"

“I’m not saying no, my boy. An abandoned campsite, an extinguished fire, can put us on the right track, and that’s what we’ll be looking for in our upcoming exploration.”

On the day the two hunters were talking like this, they were in a section of the forest near Mercy, remarkable for its beautiful trees. There, among others, stood some of those superb conifers that the natives call "kauris" in New Zealand, reaching a height of nearly two hundred feet above the ground.

"An idea, Mr. Spilett," said Harbert. "If I climbed to the top of one of those kauri trees, perhaps I could observe the country over a fairly wide radius?"

"That's a good idea," replied the reporter, "but will you be able to climb to the top of those giants?"

"I'll always try," replied Harbert.

The young boy, agile and skillful, darted up the first branches, whose arrangement made climbing the kauri tree quite easy, and in a few minutes he had reached its summit, which emerged from the vast green plain formed by the rounded branches of the forest. From this high point, the view extended over the entire southern portion of the island, from Cape Claw in the southeast to Reptile Headland in the southwest. In the northwest rose Mount Franklin, which obscured a large quarter of the horizon.

But Harbert, from the top of his observatory, could precisely observe this whole still unknown portion of the island, which had been able to give or was giving refuge to the foreigners whose presence was suspected.

The young boy looked with extreme attention. On the sea at first, nothing in sight. Not a sail, neither on the horizon, nor on the island's shores.

However, since the dense forest obscured the shoreline, it was possible that a vessel, especially one without its masts, might have come very close to land and, consequently, been invisible to Harbert. In

the heart of the Far West woods, there was nothing either. The forest formed an impenetrable dome, measuring several square miles, without a single clearing or opening. It was even impossible to trace the course of the Mercy River and identify the point in the mountains where it originated.

Perhaps other creeks ran westward, but there was no evidence to suggest this.

But, at least, if Harbert missed all signs of a camp, could he not detect some smoke in the air that would reveal the presence of the man? The atmosphere was clear, and the slightest vapor would have stood out clearly against the background of the sky.

For a moment, Harbert thought he saw a wisp of smoke rising in the west, but closer observation proved him mistaken. He looked with extreme care, and his eyesight was excellent... no, definitely, there was nothing.

Harbert climbed back down to the foot of the kauri tree, and the two hunters returned to Granite House. There, Cyrus Smith listened to the boy's story, shook his head, and said nothing. It was quite clear that this question could only be answered after a thorough exploration of the island.

Two days later—October 28—another incident occurred, the explanation for which was still to be desired. While prowling along the shore two miles from Granite House, Harbert and Nab were fortunate enough to capture a magnificent specimen of the order Chelonia. It was a green sea turtle of the genus Mydase, whose shell displayed admirable green iridescence.

Harbert spotted the turtle slithering between the rocks to reach the sea.

"To me, Nab, to me!" he shouted.

Nab ran up.

"What a beautiful animal!" said Nab, "but how can we capture it?"

“Nothing could be easier, Nab,” replied Harbert. “We’ll turn this tortoise onto its back, and it won’t be able to burrow back. Take your spear and do as I do.”

Sensing the danger, the reptile had retreated between its shell and its plastron. Neither its head nor its legs could be seen, and it was as still as a rock.

Harbert and Nab then inserted their sticks under the animal's sternum, and, joining forces, they managed, not without difficulty, to

turn it onto its back. This tortoise, which measured three feet in length, must have weighed at least four hundred pounds.

"Good!" cried Nab, "that will surely please our friend Pencroff!" Indeed, Pencroff could not fail to be pleased, for the flesh of these turtles, which feed on eelgrass, is extremely tasty. At this moment, only its small, flattened head was visible, though it was greatly enlarged at the rear by large temporal fossae, hidden beneath a bony arch.

"And now what shall we do with our game?" said Nab. "We can't drag it to Granite-House!"

"Let's leave him here, since he can't turn around," replied Harbert, "and we'll come back to get him with the wagon."

— That's settled.

However, as a precaution, Harbert took the step, which Nab considered unnecessary, of wedging the animal in place with large pebbles. After this, the two hunters returned to Granite-House, following the beach which the low tide was exposing in large quantities.

Harbert, wanting to surprise Pencroff, told him nothing about the "superb specimen of chelonians"

He had turned it over on the sand; but two hours later, he and Nab were back, with the cart, at the spot where they had left it. The "superb

specimen of chelonians" was no longer there.

Nab and Harbert looked at each other first, then they looked around. It was indeed in that spot that the turtle had been left. The young boy even found the pebbles he had used, and, therefore, he was certain he wasn't mistaken.

"Ah, so!" said Nab, "these beasts turn around, then?"

"It seems so," replied Harbert, who could not understand anything and was looking at the pebbles scattered on the sand.

— Well, Pencroff won't be happy!

"And Mr. Smith may well be in a difficult position to explain this disappearance!" thought Harbert.

"Well," said Nab, who wanted to hide his mishap, "we won't talk about it."

"On the contrary, Nab, we need to talk about it," replied Harbert.

And the two of them, taking up the cart which they had brought in vain, returned to Granite-House.

Arriving at the shipyard, where the engineer and the sailor were working together, Harbert recounted what had happened.

"Ah! The clumsy fellows!" cried the sailor. "To have spilled at least fifty bowls of soup!"

"But, Pencroff," replied Nab, "it's not our fault that the beast ran away, since I tell you that we had turned it over!"

"So, you hadn't turned it over enough!" retorted the intractable sailor jokingly.

"Not enough!" cried Harbert.

And he recounted that he had taken care to wedge the turtle in place with pebbles.

"So it's a miracle!" replied Pencroff.

"I thought, Mr. Cyrus," said Harbert, "that turtles, once placed on their backs, could not right themselves, especially when they were large?"

"That is true, my child," replied Cyrus Smith.

— So, how could it have happened...?

"How far from the sea did you leave that turtle?" asked the engineer, who, having suspended his work, was reflecting on this incident.

"At most fifteen feet," replied Harbert.

— And the tide was low at that time?

— Yes, Mr. Cyrus.

"Well," replied the engineer, "what the turtle couldn't do on the sand, it may well have done in the water. It would have turned around when

the current swept it back, and it would have calmly made its way back to the open sea."

— Ah! How clumsy we are! cried Nab.

"That is precisely what I had the honor of telling you!" replied Pencroff.

Cyrus Smith had offered this explanation, which was undoubtedly plausible. But was he truly convinced of its validity? One wouldn't dare say so.

CHAPTER II

On October 29th, the birchbark canoe was completely finished. Pencroff had kept his promise, and a kind of dugout canoe, its hull framed with flexible crejimba poles, had been built in five days. A bench at the stern, a second bench amidships to maintain the beam, a third bench at the bow, a gunwale to support the oarlocks of two oars, and a sculling oar for steering completed this twelve-foot-long craft, which weighed less than two hundred pounds. As for launching it, the operation was extremely simple. The light canoe was carried onto the sand at the edge of the shore in front of Granite House, and the rising tide lifted it.

Pencroff, who immediately jumped in, maneuvered it with a sculling oar, and was able to see that it was very suitable for the intended use.

"Hurrah!" cried the sailor, who didn't disdain to celebrate his own triumph in this way. "With that, we'd go all the way..."

"A lot of people?" asked Gideon Spilett.

“No, from the island. A few stones for ballast, a mast on the bow, and a bit of sail that Mr. Smith will make for us one day, and we’ll go far! Well then! Mr. Cyrus, and you, Mr. Spilett, and you, Harbert, and you, Nab, aren’t you going to come and try out our new vessel? Good heavens! We must see if it can carry all five of us!”

Indeed, it was an experiment worth trying. Pencroff, with a stroke of his sculling oar, brought the boat close to the shore through a narrow passage left between the rocks, and it was agreed that they would test the dugout canoe that very day, following the shoreline to the first point where the southern rocks ended. Just as they were about to embark, Nab cried out:

"But your building is letting in quite a bit of water, Pencroff!"

“It’s nothing, Nab,” replied the sailor. “The wood just needs to seal itself! In two days it won’t be noticeable, and our canoe won’t have any more water in it than there is in a drunkard’s stomach. All aboard!”

So we embarked, and Pencroff pushed off into the open sea.

The weather was magnificent, the sea calm as if its waters were contained within the narrow shores of a lake, and the canoe could face it with as much safety as if it had been paddling up the tranquil current of the Mercy. Of the two oars, Nab took one, Harbert the other, and Pencroff remained at the stern of the boat, in order to steer it with a sculling oar.

The sailor first crossed the channel and sailed close to the southern tip of the islet. A light breeze was blowing from the south. There was no swell, either in the channel or offshore. A few long undulations, barely felt by the canoe because it was heavily laden, regularly swelled the surface of the sea. They moved about half a mile from the shore, so that they could see the full extent of Mount Franklin.

Then, Pencroff, changing course, returned towards the mouth of the river. The dugout canoe then followed the shore, which, curving to its extreme point, hid the entire marshy plain of the Shelducks.

This point, whose distance was increased by the curve of the coast, was about three miles from Mercy. The colonists resolved to go to its tip and only go beyond it by the smallest amount of time necessary to get a quick glimpse of the coast as far as Cape Claw.

The boat therefore followed the coastline at a distance of no more than two cable lengths, avoiding the reefs that dotted these landing places and which the rising tide was beginning to cover. The wall sloped downwards from the river mouth to the point. It was a jumble of granite, capriciously distributed, very different from the curtain wall, which formed the Grande-vue plateau, and of an extremely wild appearance.

It looked as if an enormous cartload of rocks had been emptied there. There was no vegetation on this very sharp promontory which extended two miles in front of the forest, and this point rather well resembled the arm of a giant that had emerged from a sleeve of greenery.

The canoe, propelled by the two oars, moved forward effortlessly. Gideon Spilett, pencil in one hand, notebook in the other, sketched the coastline in broad strokes.

Nab, Pencroff and Harbert were talking as they examined this part of their domain, new to their eyes, and, as the canoe went south, the two Mandible capes seemed to move and close Union Bay more closely.

As for Cyrus Smith, he did not speak, he watched, and, from the defiance expressed in his gaze, it always seemed that he was observing some strange land.

However, after three-quarters of an hour of sailing, the canoe had reached almost the tip of the point, and Pencroff was preparing to round it, when Harbert, getting up, pointed to a dark spot, saying:

"What do I see over there on the beach?"

All eyes turned towards the indicated point.

"Indeed," said the reporter, "there is something there. It looks like a shipwreck half-buried in the sand."

"Ah!" cried Pencroff, "I see what it is!"

"What is it?" asked Nab.

— Barrels, barrels, which can be full! replied the sailor.

“To the shore, Pencroff!” said Cyrus Harding.

With a few strokes of the oar, the canoe landed at the bottom of a small cove, and its passengers jumped onto the shore.

Pencroff was not mistaken. Two barrels were there, half-buried in the sand, but still firmly attached to a large crate which, supported by them, had thus floated until it came to rest on the shore.

"So there was a shipwreck in the vicinity of the island?" asked Harbert.

"Obviously," replied Gideon Spilett.

"But what's in that crate?" cried Pencroff with perfectly understandable impatience. "What's in that crate? It's closed, and there's nothing to break the lid on! Well, then, with stones..."

And the sailor, lifting a heavy block, was about to break through one of the sides of the crate, when the engineer stopped him:

"Pencroff," he said to him, "can you moderate your impatience for just one hour?"

— But, Mr. Cyrus, just think! Perhaps everything we need is in there!

“We shall know, Pencroff,” replied the engineer, “but believe me, don’t break that crate; it may prove useful to us. Let’s take it to Granite House, where we can open it more easily and without breaking it. It’s all prepared for the journey, and since it’s floated this far, it will certainly float all the way to the river mouth.”

"You are right, Mr. Cyrus, and I was wrong," replied the sailor, "but one is not always in control of oneself!"

The engineer's advice was sound. Indeed, the dugout canoe wouldn't have been able to hold the items likely contained in that crate, which must have been heavy, since it had to be "lightened" with two empty barrels. Therefore, it was better to tow it as it was to the shore of Granite-House.

And now, where did this wreck come from? That was the important question. Cyrus Smith and his companions looked carefully around them and walked along the shore for several hundred paces. No other debris appeared.

The sea was also observed. Harbert and Nab climbed onto a high rock, but the horizon was deserted. Nothing was in sight, neither a disabled vessel nor a ship under sail.

However, there had been a shipwreck, of that there was no doubt. Perhaps this incident was even related to the lead pellet incident? Perhaps foreigners had landed at another point on the island? Perhaps they were still there? But the colonists naturally reasoned that these foreigners could not be Malay pirates, since the wreck obviously had either American or European origins.

They all returned to the crate, which measured five feet long by three feet wide. It was made of oak, very carefully sealed, and covered with a thick hide held in place by copper nails. The two large barrels, hermetically sealed but feeling empty when struck, were attached to its sides by strong ropes tied with knots that Pencroff easily recognized as nautical knots. It appeared to be in a perfect state of preservation, which was explained by the fact that it had washed ashore on a sandy beach and not on reefs. Upon closer examination, one could even say

that its time at sea had not been long, and that its arrival on this shore was recent. Water did not appear to have penetrated the interior, and the objects it contained must have been intact.

It was evident that this crate had been thrown overboard from a disabled ship, running towards the island, and that, in the hope that it would reach the shore, where they would later find it, some passengers had taken the precaution of lightening it by means of a floating device.

"We will tow this wreck to Granite House," said the engineer, "and take inventory of it; then, if we discover any survivors of this presumed shipwreck on the island, we will return it to those to whom it belongs. If we find no one..."

"We'll keep it for ourselves!" cried Pencroff. "But, good heavens, what could possibly be in there!"

The tide was already beginning to reach the wreck, which was obviously floating in the open sea. One of the ropes that secured the barrels was partially unwound and used as a mooring line to tie the floating contraption to the boat. Then, Pencroff and Nab dug in the sand with their oars to make it easier to move the crate, and soon the boat, towing the crate, began to round the point, which came to be known as Flotson Point. The towline was heavy, and the barrels were barely enough to keep the crate afloat. The sailor feared at every moment that

it would break loose and sink to the bottom. But, fortunately, his fears were unfounded, and an hour and a half after setting out—it had taken all that time to cover the three miles—the canoe reached the shore in front of Granite House.

The canoe and the wreck were then hauled onto the sand, and, as the sea was already receding, they soon remained ashore. Nab had gone to fetch tools to force open the crate, so as to damage it as little as possible, and an inventory was taken.

Pencroff made no attempt to hide the fact that he was extremely moved.

The sailor began by detaching the two barrels, which, being in very good condition, could be used, needless to say. Then, the locks were forced open with pliers, and the lid swung shut immediately. A second zinc lining covered the inside of the crate, which had clearly been designed so that the objects it contained would be protected from moisture under all circumstances.

"Ah!" cried Nab, "could that be canned goods in there!"

"I certainly hope not," replied the reporter.

"If only there were..." said the sailor in a low voice.

"What is it?" asked Nab, who heard him.

- Nothing!"

The zinc lid was split open across its entire width, then folded back over the sides of the crate, and, little by little, various objects of very different kinds were extracted and placed on the sand. With each new object, Pencroff shouted new hurrahs, Harbert clapped his hands, and Nab danced... like a madman. There were books that would have made Harbert deliriously happy, and kitchen utensils that Nab would have covered with kisses!

Moreover, the colonists had every reason to be extremely satisfied, for this crate contained tools, weapons, instruments, clothing, books, and here is the exact list, as recorded in Gideon Spilett's notebook:

Tools: 3 multi-bladed knives.

2 wood-axes.

2 carpenter's axes.

Tools: 3 planes.

2 adzes.

1 scythe.

6 cold chisels.

2 files.

3 hammers.

3 awls.

2 augers.

10 bags of nails and screws.

3 saws of various sizes.

Tools: 2 boxes of needles.

Weapons: 2 flintlock rifles.

2 cap-and-cap rifles.

2 centerfire rifles.

5 cutlasses.

4 boarding sabers.

2 powder kegs, each holding 25 pounds.

12 boxes of fulminating percussion caps.

Instruments: 1 sextant. 1 pair of binoculars.

Instruments: 1 spyglass.

1 compass set.

1 pocket compass.

1 Fahrenheit thermometer. 1 aneroid barometer.

One box containing a complete photographic apparatus, lens, plates, chemicals, etc.

Clothing: Two dozen shirts of a peculiar fabric that resembled wool but was clearly of vegetable origin.

Three dozen stockings of the same fabric.

Utensils: One iron kettle.

Six tinned copper pots.

Three iron dishes.

Ten aluminum utensils.

Two kettles.

One small portable stove.

Six table knives.

Books: One Bible containing the Old and New Testaments.

One atlas.

One dictionary of various Polynesian languages.

One six-volume dictionary of natural sciences.

Three reams of white paper.

Two blank ledgers.

"It must be admitted," said the reporter, after the inventory had been completed, "that the owner of this crate was a practical man! Tools, weapons, instruments, clothes, utensils, books, nothing is missing! It really seems as if he expected to be shipwrecked and had prepared for it in advance!"

"Indeed, nothing is missing," murmured Cyrus Smith thoughtfully.

"And for sure," added Harbert, "the building that carried this crate and its owner was not a Malay pirate!"

"Unless," said Pencroff, "this owner had been taken prisoner by pirates..."

"That's inadmissible," replied the reporter. "It's more likely that an American or European ship was caught in these waters, and that passengers, wanting to save at least the essentials, prepared this crate and threw it into the sea."

"Is that your opinion, Mr. Cyrus?" asked Harbert.

“Yes, my child,” replied the engineer, “that could have been the case. It’s possible that at the time, or in anticipation of a shipwreck, various essential items were gathered in this crate, to be found somewhere along the coast…”

"Even the camera box!" remarked the sailor, looking rather incredulous.

"As for this device," replied Cyrus Smith, "I don't quite understand its usefulness, and a more complete assortment of clothing or more abundant ammunition would have been better for us, as for all other shipwrecked people!"

"But is there no mark, no address on these instruments, on these tools, on these books, that could allow us to recognize their origin?" asked Gideon Spilett.

It was quite a sight. Each object was therefore carefully examined, especially the books, instruments, and weapons. Neither the weapons nor the instruments, contrary to usual practice, bore the manufacturer's mark; moreover, they were in perfect condition and did not appear to have been used. The same was true for the tools and utensils; everything was new, which proved, in short, that these objects had not been taken at random and thrown into this crate, but, on the contrary, that their selection had been deliberate and their arrangement carefully executed. This was also indicated by the second metal casing that had protected them from all moisture and which could not have been welded on in a moment of haste.

As for the dictionaries of natural sciences and Polynesian languages, both were in English, but they bore neither a publisher's name nor a publication date. The same was true of the Bible, printed in English, a quarto volume remarkable for its typography, and which appeared to have been frequently consulted.

As for the atlas, it was a magnificent work, including maps of the whole world and several planispheres drawn according to the Mercator projection, and whose nomenclature was in French, — but which also bore neither a date of publication nor the name of the publisher.

Therefore, there was no indication on these various objects that could point to their origin, and consequently nothing to suggest the nationality of the ship that must have recently passed through these waters. But wherever this crate came from, it made the settlers of Lincoln Island rich.

Until then, by transforming the products of nature, they had created everything by themselves, and thanks to their intelligence, they had managed to get by.

But did it not seem that providence wished to reward them, by sending them these various products of human industry? Their thanks therefore rose unanimously to heaven.

However, one of them was not entirely satisfied.

It was Pencroff. Apparently, the crate did not contain anything to which he seemed to be particularly attached, and, as the items were removed from it, his hurrahs diminished in intensity, and, the inventory finished, he was heard to murmur these words:

"All this is very nice and all, but you'll see there won't be anything for me in that box!"

Which led Nab to say to him:

"Ah, well! My friend Pencroff, what were you waiting for?"

"Half a pound of tobacco!" replied Pencroff seriously, "and nothing would have been lacking in my happiness!"

We couldn't help but laugh at the sailor's observation.

But the discovery of the wreck made it clear that, now more than ever, a serious exploration of the island was necessary. It was therefore agreed that the following day, at daybreak, they would set out, sailing up the Mercy River, in order to reach the west coast.

If any shipwrecked people had landed at some point on this coast, it was to be feared that they were without resources, and it was necessary to come to their aid without delay.

During that day, the various objects were transported to Granite-House and methodically arranged in the great hall.

That day — October 29 — was precisely a Sunday, and, before going to bed, Harbert asked the engineer if he would not like to read them some passage from the gospel.

"Gladly," replied Cyrus Smith.

He took the sacred book and was about to open it when Pencroff stopped him and said:

"Mr. Cyrus, I am superstitious. Open at random, and read us the first verse that falls before you. We will see if it applies to our situation."

Cyrus Smith smiled at the sailor's reflection, and, yielding to his wish, he opened the gospel precisely to a place where a bookmark separated the pages.

Suddenly, his gaze was caught by a red cross, which, drawn in pencil, was placed in front of verse 8 of chapter VII of the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

And he read this verse, which reads: Everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds.

CHAPTER III

The next day—October 30—everything was ready for the planned exploration, which recent events had made so urgent. Indeed, things had turned out in such a way that the settlers on Lincoln Island could imagine they were no longer asking for help, but rather able to provide it themselves.

It was therefore agreed that they would go up the Mercy River as far as the current was navigable. Much of the journey would thus be made without fatigue, and the explorers could transport their supplies and weapons to an advanced point in the west of the island.

It had been necessary, in fact, to consider not only the items they were taking with them, but also those that chance might allow them to

bring back to Granite House. If there had been a shipwreck on the coast, as everything suggested, there would be no shortage of wreckage, and it would be a good catch. In this scenario, the wagon would undoubtedly have been more suitable than the fragile canoe; but this wagon, heavy and cumbersome, had to be pulled, which made its use less convenient, and which led Pencroff to express his regret that the crate had not contained, along with "his half-pound of tobacco," a pair of those sturdy New Jersey horses, which would have been very useful to the colony!

The provisions, already loaded by Nab, consisted of canned meat and a few gallons of beer and fermented liquor—enough to sustain them for three days, the longest period Cyrus Smith allotted for the exploration. Moreover, they planned to resupply along the way if necessary, and Nab was careful not to forget the small portable stove. As for tools, the colonists took two lumberjack axes, intended for clearing a path through the dense forest, and, as instruments, a telescope and a pocket compass.

For weapons, they chose two flintlock rifles, more useful on the island than rifles with mechanisms, the former using only flints, easily replaceable, and the latter requiring fulminating percussion caps, which frequent use would have quickly depleted. However, they also took one of the carbines and some cartridges. As for gunpowder, the barrels of

which held about fifty pounds, they had to carry a certain supply, but the engineer planned to manufacture an explosive substance that would allow them to conserve it. In addition to the firearms, they took five cutlasses well sheathed in leather, and, under these conditions, the colonists could venture into this vast forest with some chance of getting out of trouble.

Needless to say, Pencroff, Harbert and Nab, thus armed, were at the height of their desires, although Cyrus Smith had made them promise not to fire a shot unnecessarily.

At six o'clock in the morning, the dugout canoe was pushed into the sea. Everyone boarded, including Top, and headed towards the mouth of the Mercy River.

The tide had only been coming in for half an hour. There were still a few hours of flood tide left, which they needed to take advantage of, because later the ebb tide would make going upriver difficult. The current was already strong, as the moon was due to be full in three days, and the dugout canoe, which only needed to be kept in the current, moved quickly between the two high banks without needing to increase its speed with the oars. In a few minutes, the explorers had reached the bend in the Mercy River, and precisely the corner where, seven months earlier, Pencroff had assembled his first raft of timber.

After this rather acute angle, the river, rounding itself off, veered towards the southwest, and its course developed under the shade of large conifers with permanent greenery.

The banks of the Mercy looked magnificent.

Cyrus Smith and his companions could only admire without reservation these beautiful effects that nature so easily obtains with water and trees.

As they progressed, the tree species changed. On the right bank of the river, magnificent specimens of elms, those prized true elms so sought after by builders, stood in tiers, their wood having the remarkable property of preserving itself for a long time in water. Then came numerous groups belonging to the same family, including hackberry trees, whose kernels produce a very useful oil. Further on, Harbert noticed some swamp elms, whose flexible branches, soaked in water, provide excellent rope, and two or three ebony trunks, which displayed a beautiful black color streaked with capricious veins. From time to time, in certain spots where landing was easy, the canoe came to a stop.

So Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Pencroff, rifle in hand and preceded by Top, were scouring the bank. Besides the game, there might be some useful plant that should not be disdained, and the young naturalist was well served, for he discovered a kind of wild spinach from the

Chenopodiaceae family and numerous specimens of cruciferous plants, belonging to the cabbage genus, which it would certainly be possible to "civilize" by transplantation; these were cress, horseradish, turnips and finally small branching stems, slightly hairy, a meter high, which produced almost brown seeds.

"Do you know what this plant is?" Harbert asked the sailor.

"Tobacco!" cried Pencroff, who, obviously, had never seen his favorite plant except in the bowl of his pipe.

— No! Pencroff! replied Harbert, it's not tobacco, it's mustard.

"So be it, mustard!" replied the sailor, "but if, by chance, a tobacco plant should appear, my boy, please do not disdain it."

"We'll find one someday!" said Gideon Spilett.

"True!" exclaimed Pencroff. "Well, on that day, I truly don't know what our island will lack!"

These various plants, which had been carefully uprooted, were transported in the dugout canoe, which Cyrus Smith did not leave, always absorbed in his thoughts.

The reporter, Harbert, and Pencroff landed several times, sometimes on the right bank of the Mercy, sometimes on its left. The left bank was less steep, but the right bank was more wooded. The engineer was able

to determine, by consulting his pocket compass, that the river's direction from the first bend was roughly southwest and northeast, and almost straight for a distance of about three miles. But it was likely that this direction changed further on and that the Mercy turned northwest, toward the foothills of Mount Franklin, which would supply it with their waters.

During one of these excursions, Gideon Spilett managed to capture two pairs of live gallinaceous birds. They were long-beaked, slender birds with elongated necks, short wings, and no apparent tail. Harbert aptly named them "tinamous," and it was decided that they would be the first inhabitants of the future poultry yard.

But until then the guns had not spoken, and the first detonation that resounded in this Far West forest was caused by the appearance of a beautiful bird that anatomically resembled a kingfisher.

"I recognize him!" cried Pencroff, and it can be said that his shot went off despite himself.

"What do you recognize?" asked the reporter.

— The bird that escaped us on our first excursion and after which we named this part of the forest.

"A jacamar!" cried Harbert.

It was a jacamar, indeed, a handsome bird with rather rough plumage that had a metallic sheen. A few pellets of lead had brought it to the ground, and Top brought it back to the boat, along with a dozen "turacos-loris," a type of climbing bird the size of a pigeon, all painted green, with part of their wings crimson and an upright crest edged in white. The young boy was credited with this fine shot, and he was quite proud of it. The lorises made better game than the jacamar, whose flesh is a bit tough, but it would have been difficult to convince Pencroff that he hadn't killed the king of edible birds.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the dugout canoe reached a second bend in the Mercy River, about five miles from its mouth. They stopped there for lunch, and this stop, sheltered by large and beautiful trees, lasted for half an hour.

The river was still sixty to seventy feet wide, and its bed five to six feet deep. The engineer had observed that numerous tributaries swelled its course, but these were merely unnavigable streams. As for the forest, whether known as Jacamar Wood or the Far West Forests, it stretched as far as the eye could see. Nowhere, neither beneath the tall trees nor under the trees along the banks of the Mercy, was there any sign of human presence. The explorers could find no suspicious trace, and it was clear that the lumberjack's axe had never cut these trees,

that the pioneer's knife had never severed these vines stretched from trunk to trunk amidst the thick brush and long grasses. Although some shipwrecked people had landed on the island, they had not yet left the coastline, and it was not under this thick cover that the survivors of the presumed shipwreck should be sought.

The engineer was therefore in a certain hurry to reach the western coast of Lincoln Island, which he estimated to be at least five miles away.

Navigation resumed, and although, by its current course, the Mercy appeared to be heading not for the coast but rather for Mount Franklin, it was decided that the dugout canoe would be used as long as it found enough water under its keel to float. This saved considerable effort and also time, as it would otherwise have been necessary to hack a path through the thick undergrowth with an axe.

But soon the current ceased entirely, either because the tide was going out—and indeed it was due to go out at that hour—or because it was no longer felt at that distance from the mouth of the Mercy. It was therefore necessary to equip the oars. Nab and Harbert took their places on the bench, Pencroff took up the sculling oar, and the journey upriver continued.

It seemed then that the forest was thinning out on the Far West side. The trees were less dense and often stood alone. But precisely because they were more spaced out, they benefited more fully from the free and pure air circulating around them, and they were magnificent. What splendid examples of the flora of that latitude! Indeed, their presence alone would have been enough for a botanist to name without hesitation the parallel through which Lincoln Island passed!

"Eucalyptus trees!" Harbert had exclaimed.

These were, indeed, magnificent trees, the last giants of the extratropical zone, related to the eucalyptus trees of Australia and New Zealand, both located at the same latitude as Lincoln Island. Some rose to a height of two hundred feet. Their trunks measured twenty feet in circumference at their base, and their bark, crisscrossed by networks of fragrant resin, was up to five inches thick. Nothing could be more marvelous, but also more singular, than these enormous specimens of the myrtle family, whose foliage faced the light in profile, allowing the sun's rays to reach the ground! At the foot of these eucalyptus trees, fresh grass carpeted the ground, and from among the clumps flew flocks of small birds, resplendent in the beams of light like winged carbuncles.

"Look at those trees!" cried Nab, "but are they good for anything?"

"Pshaw!" replied Pencroff. "Giant plants must be just like human giants. They're only good for showing off at fairs!"

"I think you are mistaken, Pencroff," replied Gideon Spilett, "and that eucalyptus wood is beginning to be used very advantageously in cabinetmaking."

— And I will add, said the young boy, that these eucalyptus trees belong to a family which includes many useful members: the guava tree, which gives guavas; the clove tree, which produces cloves; the pomegranate tree, which bears pomegranates; the Eugenia cauliflora, whose fruits are used to make a passable wine; the Ugni myrtle, which contains an excellent alcoholic liqueur; the Caryophyllus myrtle, whose bark forms an esteemed cinnamon; the Eugenia pimenta, from which allspice comes; the common myrtle, whose berries can replace pepper; the Eucalyptus robusta, which produces a kind of excellent manna; the Eucalyptus gunnei, whose sap is transformed into beer by fermentation; Finally, all those trees known as "trees of life" or "ironwood," which belong to the Myrtaceae family, comprising forty-six genera and thirteen hundred species!

The young boy was allowed to proceed, and he enthusiastically delivered his little botany lesson.

Cyrus Smith listened to him smiling, and Pencroff with a feeling of pride impossible to express.

"Well, Harbert," replied Pencroff, "but I would dare swear that all those useful specimens you have just cited are not giants like these!"

— Indeed, Pencroff.

"So this supports what I said," replied the sailor, "namely: that giants are good for nothing!"

"That's what's misleading you, Pencroff," said the engineer then, "and precisely these gigantic eucalyptus trees that shelter us are good for something."

— And to what end?

— To clean up the country they live in. — Do you know what they are called in Australia and New Zealand?

— No, Mr. Cyrus.

They are called "fever trees."

— Because they give it away?

— No, because they're preventing it!

"Good. I'll make a note of that," said the reporter.

— So take note, my dear Spilett, for it seems proven that the presence of eucalyptus trees is sufficient to neutralize malarial miasmas. This

natural preventative has been tested in certain regions of southern Europe and North Africa, where the soil was utterly unhealthy, and the health of the inhabitants has gradually improved. No more intermittent fevers in the areas covered by these myrtle forests. This fact is now beyond doubt, and it is a fortunate circumstance for us settlers on Lincoln Island.

"Ah! What an island! What a blessed island!" cried Pencroff. "I tell you, it lacks nothing... except..."

“That will come, Pencroff, that will be found,” replied the engineer; “but let us resume our journey, and push as far as the river can carry our canoe!”

The exploration continued for at least two miles through a region covered in eucalyptus trees, which dominated all the woods in this part of the island. The area they covered extended beyond sight on either side of the Mercy River, whose rather meandering bed was carved between high, verdant banks. This bed was often obstructed by tall grasses and even sharp rocks, making navigation quite difficult. The oars were hampered, and Pencroff had to push with a pole. It was also clear that the riverbed was gradually rising, and that the moment was not far off when the boat, running out of water, would be forced to stop. Already the sun was sinking below the horizon, casting the trees' long

shadows across the ground. Cyrus Smith, seeing that he could not reach the west coast of the island that day, resolved to camp in the very spot where, for lack of water, navigation would inevitably be halted. He estimated that he must still be five or six miles from the coast, and this distance was too great for him to attempt to cross during the night through those unfamiliar woods.

The boat was thus pushed relentlessly through the forest, which gradually grew denser and seemed more inhabited, for, if the sailor's eyes did not deceive him, he thought he saw bands of monkeys running beneath the undergrowth. Sometimes, two or three of these animals even stopped some distance from the canoe and looked at the settlers without showing any terror, as if, seeing men for the first time, they had not yet learned to fear them. It would have been easy to shoot these quadrupeds, but Cyrus Smith opposed this pointless slaughter, which somewhat tempted the enraged Pencroff. Besides, it was prudent, for these monkeys, vigorous and endowed with extreme agility, could be formidable, and it was best not to provoke them with a completely untimely attack.

It is true that the sailor considered the monkey from a purely nutritional point of view, and indeed these animals, which are solely

herbivores, make excellent game; but, since provisions were plentiful, it was useless to spend ammunition in pure waste.

Around four o'clock, navigation on the Mercy became very difficult, as its course was obstructed by aquatic plants and rocks. The banks rose higher and higher, and the riverbed was already being carved out between the first foothills of Mount Franklin. Its sources could not be far away, since they were fed by all the waters on the southern slopes of the mountain.

"Before a quarter of an hour has passed," said the sailor, "we will be forced to stop, Mr. Cyrus."

— Well, we will stop, Pencroff, and set up camp for the night.

"How far can we be from Granite-House?" asked Harbert.

"About seven miles," replied the engineer, "but taking into account, however, the detours of the river, which have taken us to the northwest."

"Are we continuing to move forward?" asked the reporter.

"Yes, and for as long as we can," replied Cyrus Smith. "Tomorrow, at daybreak, we will abandon the canoe, we will cross in two hours, I hope, the distance that separates us from the coast, and we will have almost the whole day to explore the shoreline."

"Forward!" replied Pencroff.

But soon the dugout canoe scraped the stony bottom of the river, which was then no more than twenty feet wide. A thick canopy of greenery arched over its bed and enveloped it in semi-darkness. The rather loud sound of a waterfall could also be heard, indicating the presence of a natural dam a few hundred paces upstream.

And indeed, at the last bend of the river, a waterfall appeared through the trees. The canoe hit the bottom of the riverbed, and, a few moments later, it was tied to a tree trunk near the right bank.

It was about five o'clock. The last rays of sunlight slipped beneath the thick canopy and struck the small waterfall obliquely, its damp dust shimmering with prism-like colors. Beyond, the Mercy's bed disappeared beneath the undergrowth, where it was fed by some hidden spring. The various streams that flowed into it further downstream transformed it into a veritable river, but there it was nothing more than a clear, shallow brook.

They camped in that very spot, which was charming. The colonists disembarked, and a fire was lit under a cluster of large hackberry trees, between the branches of which Cyrus Smith and his companions could have found shelter for the night if necessary.

Supper was soon devoured, for they were hungry, and all that remained was sleep. But, as some suspicious roars were heard with nightfall, the hearth was stoked for the night, so as to protect the sleepers from its crackling flames. Nab and Pencroff even took turns keeping watch and spared no fuel. Perhaps they were not mistaken when they thought they saw some animal shadows wandering around the camp, either under the undergrowth or among the branches; but the night passed without incident, and the next day, October 31st, at five o'clock in the morning, everyone was up and ready to leave.

CHAPTER IV

It was at six o'clock in the morning that the colonists, after a first breakfast, set off again, intending to reach the island's west coast by the shortest route. How long would it take them? Cyrus Smith had said two hours, but that obviously depended on the nature of the obstacles they would encounter. This part of the Far West seemed densely wooded, like an immense thicket composed of extremely varied species. It was therefore likely that they would have to force their way through grass, brush, and vines, and walk with an axe in hand—and a rifle too, no doubt, if they were to believe the cries of wild animals heard during the night.

The exact position of the encampment could be determined by the situation of Mount Franklin, and, since the volcano rose up in the north at a distance of less than three miles, it was only a matter of taking a straight course southwest to reach the west coast.

We set off, after carefully securing the canoe. Pencroff and Nab were carrying provisions that should be enough to feed the small group for at least two days.

Hunting was no longer an option, and the engineer even advised his companions to avoid any untimely detonations, so as not to signal their presence in the vicinity of the coastline.

The first axe blows were struck in the undergrowth, amidst mastic bushes, a little above the waterfall, and, with his compass in hand, Cyrus Smith indicated the way to follow.

The forest at that time consisted of trees, most of which had already been identified in the vicinity of the lake and the Grande-Vue plateau. These included deodar, Douglas fir, casuarina, gum trees, eucalyptus, dragon tree, hibiscus, cedar, and other species, generally of modest size, as their sheer number had hindered their growth. The settlers could therefore only advance slowly along this road, which they were forging on foot and which, in the engineer's mind, would later be connected to the Red Creek road. Since their departure, the settlers had been

descending the low slopes that constituted the island's orographic system, over very dry terrain, but whose luxuriant vegetation suggested either the presence of an underground hydrographic network or the nearby course of some stream.

However, Cyrus Smith did not recall, during his excursion to the crater, recognizing any other waterways besides the Red Creek and the Mercy.

During the first few hours of the excursion, we saw bands of monkeys again, seemingly filled with astonishment at the sight of these men, whose appearance was entirely new to them. Gideon Spilett jokingly asked if these agile and robust quadrupeds didn't consider him and his companions as degenerate brothers! And frankly, simple pedestrians, hampered at every step by undergrowth, hindered by vines, and blocked by tree trunks, were no match for these supple animals, who leaped from branch to branch, unimpeded in their march. These monkeys were numerous, but, very fortunately, they showed no hostile disposition.

We also saw some wild boars, agoutis, kangaroos and other rodents, and two or three koulas, to which Pencroff would gladly have directed a few loads of lead.

"But," he said, "the hunt is not yet open. So frolic, my friends, jump and fly in peace! We'll have a word with you when we return!"

At nine-thirty in the morning, the road, which led directly southwest, was suddenly blocked by an unknown stream, thirty to forty feet wide, whose swift current, caused by the slope of its bed and broken by numerous rocks, rushed forth with harsh roars.

This creek was deep and clear, but it would have been absolutely unnavigable.

"We're cut off!" cried Nab.

"No," replied Harbert, "it's just a stream, and we'll be able to swim across it."

"What's the point?" replied Cyrus Smith. "It's obvious this creek runs to the sea. Let's stay on its left bank, follow its shore, and I'd be very surprised if it didn't lead us to the coast very quickly. Let's go!"

"Just a moment," said the reporter. "And the name of this creek, my friends? Let's not leave our geography incomplete."

— Exactly! said Pencroff.

"Name him, my child," said the engineer, addressing the young boy.

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until we've identified it all the way to its mouth?" Harbert observed.

"So be it," replied Cyrus Smith. "Let's follow him without stopping."

"Just a moment longer!" said Pencroff.

"What is it?" asked the reporter.

"If hunting is forbidden, fishing is allowed, I suppose," said the sailor.

"We have no time to lose," replied the engineer.

"Oh! Five minutes!" replied Pencroff. "I'm only asking for five minutes for the sake of our lunch!"

And Pencroff, lying down on the bank, plunged his arms into the flowing water and soon made a few dozen beautiful crayfish jump that swarmed between the rocks.

"That will be good!" cried Nab, coming to the sailor's aid.

"When I tell you that apart from tobacco, there is everything on this island!" murmured Pencroff with a sigh.

It didn't take five minutes to make a miraculous catch, for crayfish teemed in the creek. A bag was filled with these crustaceans, whose shells were a cobalt blue and whose rostrums were armed with small teeth, and the journey resumed. Since following the bank of this new waterway, the settlers walked more easily and quickly. Moreover, the banks were untouched by any human footprints. From time to time, a few tracks left by large animals, which usually came to drink at this

stream, were found, but nothing more, and it was not yet in this part of the Far West that the peccary had received the bullet that cost Pencroff a fortune.

However, considering the swift current flowing out to sea, Cyrus Smith was led to suppose that he and his companions were much farther from the western coast than they had thought. And indeed, at that hour, the tide was rising on the shore and should have reversed the course of the creek, had its mouth been only a few miles away.

However, this effect did not occur, and the water flowed along the natural slope of the riverbed. The engineer must have been very surprised, and he frequently consulted his compass to make sure that some twist in the river was not leading him back into the Wild West.

However, the creek gradually widened, and its waters became less turbulent. The trees on its right bank were as dense as those on its left, and it was impossible to see beyond them; but these wooded masses were certainly deserted, for Top did not bark, and the intelligent animal would not have failed to signal the presence of any stranger in the vicinity of the watercourse.

At ten-thirty, to Cyrus Smith's great surprise, Harbert, who had moved a little ahead, suddenly stopped and exclaimed: "The sea!"

And a few moments later, the settlers, stopped at the edge of the forest, saw the western shore of the island unfold before their eyes.

But what a contrast between this coast and the east coast, where chance had first cast them! No more granite wall, no offshore reef, not even a sandy beach. The forest formed the shoreline, and its last trees, battered by the waves, leaned over the water. This was not a coastline, as nature usually creates, either by spreading vast carpets of sand or by grouping rocks, but an admirable fringe made up of the most beautiful trees in the world. The bank was raised so as to overlook the level of the highest seas, and on all this luxuriant ground, supported by a granite base, the splendid tree species seemed as firmly rooted as those that crowded inland.

The settlers found themselves at the indentation of a small, insignificant cove, which could not even have accommodated two or three fishing boats, and which served as the neck of the new creek; but, curiously, its waters, instead of flowing into the sea through a gently sloping mouth, plunged from a height of more than forty feet—which explained why, at the time the tide was rising, it had not been felt upstream of the creek. Indeed, the Pacific tides, even at their highest point, would never reach the level of the river, whose bed formed an upper reach, and millions of years, no doubt, would still pass before the

waters had eroded this granite bedrock and carved out a navigable mouth. Therefore, by common agreement, this waterway was given the name "Falls River." Beyond, to the north, the edge of the forest stretched for about two miles; then the trees thinned out, and beyond that, very picturesque hills rose in an almost straight line running north and south. In contrast, along the entire stretch of coastline between the river at the falls and Reptile Point, there were only wooded masses, magnificent trees, some upright, others leaning, whose roots were bathed by the long undulations of the sea. Now, it was toward this side, that is to say, along the entire Serpentine Peninsula, that the exploration had to continue, for this part of the coastline offered refuges that the other, arid and wild, would evidently have denied to shipwrecked sailors, whoever they might be.

The weather was fine and clear, and from the top of a cliff, on which Nab and Pencroff laid out lunch, the view could extend far into the distance.

The horizon was perfectly clear, and there wasn't a single sail offshore. Along the entire coastline, as far as the eye could see, there wasn't a building, not even a wreck. But the engineer wouldn't consider himself certain of this until he had explored the coast to the very tip of the Serpentine Peninsula.

Lunch was eaten quickly, and at 11:30, Cyrus Smith gave the signal to depart. Instead of traversing either the edge of a cliff or a sandy beach, the colonists had to follow the cover of the trees, so as to hug the coastline.

The distance between the mouth of the river and the falls of Reptile Promontory was about twelve miles. In four hours, on a passable beach, and without hurrying, the colonists could have covered this distance; but it took them twice as long to reach their goal, because the trees to turn, the brush to cut, the vines to break, constantly stopped them, and so many detours singularly lengthened their journey.

Moreover, there was nothing to indicate a recent shipwreck on this shore. It is true, as Gideon Spilett observed, that the sea could have carried everything out to sea, and that one should not conclude, from the fact that no trace of it could be found, that a ship had not been cast ashore on this part of Lincoln Island.

The reporter's reasoning was correct, and, moreover, the lead pellet incident proved beyond doubt that, for at most three months, a gunshot had been fired on the island.

It was already five o'clock, and the tip of the Serpentine Peninsula was still two miles from where the colonists were now located. It was clear that once they reached Reptile Point, Cyrus Smith and his companions

would not have time to return to the camp they had established near the Mercy springs before sunset. Hence, the necessity of spending the night on the promontory itself. But provisions were plentiful, and that was fortunate, for game birds were no longer seen on this edge, which was, after all, merely a shoreline. On the contrary, birds swarmed there: jacamars, rookicows, tragopans, grouse, lorikeets, parrots, cockatoos, pheasants, pigeons, and a hundred others. Not a tree that didn't have a nest, not a nest that wasn't filled with the beating of wings!

Around seven o'clock in the evening, the colonists, exhausted, arrived at Reptile Point, a sort of strangely sculpted spiral jutting out of the sea. Here ended the peninsula's riparian forest, and the coastline, along its entire southern section, resumed the familiar appearance of a shore, with its rocks, reefs, and beaches. It was therefore possible that a disabled ship might have run aground on this part of the island, but night was falling, and the exploration had to be postponed until the following day.

Pencroff and Harbert immediately hastened to find a suitable place to set up camp. The last trees of the Far West forest ended at this point, and among them, the young boy recognized thick clumps of bamboo.

"Well!" he said, "that's a valuable discovery."

— Precious? replied Pencroff.

“No doubt,” Harbert continued. “I won’t tell you, Pencroff, that bamboo bark, cut into flexible strips, is used to make baskets or hampers; that this bark, reduced to a pulp and macerated, is used to make Chinese paper; that the stems, depending on their size, provide walking sticks, pipe stems, and water conduits; that large bamboos make excellent building materials, light and strong, and never attacked by insects. I won’t even add that by sawing through the internodes of bamboo and keeping a portion of the transverse partition that forms the node for the base, one obtains sturdy and convenient vases that are widely used by the Chinese! No! That wouldn’t satisfy you. But…”

- But?...

— But I will tell you, if you don't already know, that in India, they eat these bamboos as a substitute for asparagus.

"Thirty-foot asparagus!" exclaimed the sailor. "And are they good?"

"Excellent," replied Harbert. "Only, it's not thirty-foot stems that we eat, but rather young bamboo shoots."

"Perfect, my boy, perfect!" replied Pencroff.

— I would also add that the pith of the new stems, preserved in vinegar, makes a very popular condiment.

— Getting better and better, Harbert.

— And finally, that these bamboos exude between their nodes a sweet liquor, from which a very pleasant drink can be made.

"Is that all?" asked the sailor.

— That's all!

— And it's not for smoking, by any chance?

"You can't smoke it, my poor Pencroff!"

Harbert and the sailor didn't have to look long for a suitable place to spend the night. The rocks along the shore—very jagged, as they were likely to be violently battered by the sea under the influence of the southwest winds—offered cavities that should have allowed them to sleep sheltered from the harsh weather. But just as they were about to enter one of these hollows, tremendous roars stopped them.

"Back!" cried Pencroff. "We only have small shot in our guns, and beasts that roar so well wouldn't care about that as much as a grain of salt!"

And the sailor, seizing Harbert by the arm, led him to the shelter of the rocks, just as a magnificent animal appeared at the entrance of the cave.

It was a jaguar, at least as large as its Asian counterparts, meaning it measured over five feet from the tip of its head to the base of its tail. Its

tawny coat was marked by several rows of regularly spaced black spots and contrasted sharply with the white fur on its belly. Harbert recognized in it that ferocious rival of the tiger, far more formidable than the cougar, which is merely the rival of the wolf!

The jaguar advanced and looked around, its fur bristling, its eyes blazing, as if it had never smelled a man before. At that moment, the reporter was rounding the high rocks, and Harbert, thinking he hadn't seen the jaguar, was about to rush toward it; but Gideon Spilett waved to him and kept walking. He was no stranger to tigers, and, advancing to within ten paces of the animal, he remained motionless, rifle at his shoulder, without a single muscle twitching.

The jaguar, crouching down, lunged at the hunter, but, just as it leaped, a bullet struck it between the eyes, and it fell dead.

Harbert and Pencroff rushed towards the jaguar. Nab and Cyrus Smith ran to their side, and they remained for a few moments contemplating the animal, lying on the ground, whose magnificent remains would make an ornament for the great hall of Granite-House.

"Ah! Mr. Spilett! How I admire and envy you!" cried Harbert in a fit of quite natural enthusiasm.

"Well, my boy," replied the reporter, "you would have done the same."

— Me! Such composure! ...

— Imagine, Harbert, that a jaguar is a hare, and you will shoot it as calmly as can be.

"There you go!" replied Pencroff. "It's no smarter than that!"

— And now, said Gideon Spilett, since this jaguar has left its lair, I don't see, my friends, why we shouldn't occupy it during the night?

"But others may return!" said Pencroff.

"All we have to do is light a fire at the entrance to the cave," said the reporter, "and they won't dare cross the threshold."

"To the house of the jaguars, then!" replied the sailor, dragging the animal's carcass after him.

The colonists headed towards the abandoned hideout, and there, while Nab skinned the jaguar, his companions piled up on the threshold a large quantity of dry wood, which the forest provided abundantly.

But Cyrus Smith, having spotted the clump of bamboo, went and cut a certain quantity, which he mixed with the fuel in the hearth.

Having done this, they settled into the cave, whose sand was strewn with bones; weapons were loaded just in case of a sudden attack; they ate supper, and then, when it was time to rest, they lit the pile of wood stacked at the cave entrance. Immediately, a veritable explosion filled

the air! It was the bamboo, catching the flames, detonating like fireworks!

That crash alone would have been enough to frighten even the most audacious beasts!

And this method of causing loud detonations was not invented by the engineer, because, according to Marco Polo, the Tartars have been using it successfully for many centuries to drive away the fearsome beasts of Central Asia from their camps.

CHAPTER V

Cyrus Smith and his companions slept like innocent marmots in the cave the jaguar had so politely left at their disposal. At sunrise, they were all on the shore, at the very tip of the headland, their gaze still fixed on the horizon, which was visible for two-thirds of its circumference. One last time, the engineer could confirm that no sail, no ship's wreck appeared on the sea, and the spyglass could detect no suspicious object.

Nothing, either, on the coastline, at least in the straight part which formed the southern coast of the promontory for a length of three miles, for beyond that, a notch in the land concealed the rest of the

coast, and even from the end of the Serpentine peninsula, one could not see Cape Claw, hidden by high rocks.

So the southern shore of the island remained to be explored. But would this exploration be undertaken immediately, and would the entire day of November 2nd be dedicated to it?

This was not part of the original plan. Indeed, when the canoe was abandoned at the source of the Mercy River, it had been agreed that after observing the west coast, they would return to retrieve it and sail back to Granite House via the Mercy River. Cyrus Smith believed at the time that the western shore could offer refuge to either a vessel in distress or a ship on a regular voyage; but, since this coastline offered no landing place, they had to look on the southern shore of the island for what they had been unable to find on the western shore.

It was Gideon Spilett who proposed to continue the exploration, so that the question of the presumed shipwreck would be completely resolved, and he asked how far Cape Claw might be from the end of the peninsula.

"About thirty miles," replied the engineer, "if we take into account the curves of the coast."

"Thirty miles!" Gideon Spilett replied. "It will be a long day's walk. Nevertheless, I think we should return to Granite House along the

southern shore."

— But, Harbert observed, from Cape Claw to Granite House, it will still be at least ten miles.

"Let's say forty miles in all," replied the reporter, "and let's not hesitate to do it. At least we'll observe this unknown coastline, and we won't have to repeat this exploration."

"Quite right," said Pencroff. "But what about the dugout canoe?"

"The canoe was alone for a day at the source of the Mercy," replied Gideon Spilett, "it can certainly stay there for two days! So far, we can hardly say that the island is infested with thieves!"

— However, said the sailor, when I remember the story of the turtle, I don't have any more confidence than necessary.

"The turtle! The turtle!" replied the reporter. "Don't you know it was the sea that turned it over?"

"Who knows?" the engineer murmured.

"But..." said Nab.

Nab had something to say, that was obvious, because he opened his mouth to speak and didn't speak.

"What do you mean, Nab?" the engineer asked him.

"If we return along the shore to Cape Claw," replied Nab, "after rounding that cape, we will be blocked..."

"By the Mercy!" replied Harbert, "Indeed, and we will have neither bridge nor boat to cross it!"

"Well, Mr. Cyrus," replied Pencroff, "with a few floating logs, we won't have any trouble crossing this river!"

"No matter," said Gideon Spilett, "it will be useful to build a bridge if we want to have easy access to the Far West!"

“A bridge!” cried Pencroff. “Well, isn’t Mr. Smith an engineer by trade? He’ll build us a bridge whenever we want one! As for getting you across the Mercy this evening without getting a single thread wet, I’ll take care of that. We still have one day’s worth of provisions, that’s all we need, and besides, game might not be as scarce today as it was yesterday. Let’s go!”

The reporter's proposal, strongly supported by the sailor, met with general approval, as everyone was eager to put an end to their doubts, and returning via Cape Griffe would complete the exploration. But there wasn't an hour to lose, for a forty-mile leg was long, and they couldn't expect to reach Granite House before nightfall.

At six o'clock in the morning, the small group set off. In anticipation of unpleasant encounters, animals with two or four legs, the rifles were

loaded with bullets, and Top, who was to lead the way, was ordered to beat the edge of the forest.

From the tip of the promontory that formed the tail of the peninsula, the coast curved over a distance of five miles, which was quickly crossed, without the most meticulous investigations having revealed the slightest trace of an ancient or recent landing, nor a wreck, nor a remnant of a camp, nor the ashes of an extinguished fire, nor a footprint!

The settlers, having reached the point where the curve ended before turning northeast to form Washington Bay, could then take in the entire southern coastline of the island. Twenty-five miles away, the coast ended at Cape Claw, barely fading into the morning mist, its appearance enhanced by a mirage, as if suspended between land and water. Between the settlers' location and the bottom of the vast bay, the shoreline consisted, first, of a wide, smooth, and flat beach, bordered by a line of trees in the background; then, the coastline, becoming quite irregular, jagged out into the sea, and finally, a few dark rocks piled up in picturesque disarray, culminating at Cape Claw.

Such was the development of this part of the island, which the explorers were seeing for the first time, and which they surveyed at a glance, after stopping for a moment.

"A ship that would put in at full speed here," said Pencroff, "would inevitably be lost. Sandbanks that extend offshore, and further on, reefs! Bad waters!"

"But at least something of that ship would remain," the reporter observed.

— There would be pieces of wood left on the reefs, and nothing on the sands, replied the sailor.

— Why is that?

— Because these sands, even more dangerous than the rocks, swallow up everything that is thrown into them, and a few days are enough for the hull of a ship of several hundred tons to disappear entirely!

"So, Pencroff," asked the engineer, "if a building had been lost on these benches, it would be no wonder that there was no trace of it left now?"

— No, Mr. Smith, with the help of time or storm. However, it would be surprising, even in that case, if debris from the masts, spars, had not been thrown onto the shore, beyond the reach of the sea.

"Let's continue our research then," replied Cyrus Smith.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, the colonists had reached the bottom of Washington Bay, and, at that moment, they had covered a distance of

twenty miles.

We stopped for lunch.

There began an irregular coastline, strangely jagged and covered by a long line of those reefs that followed the sandbanks, and which the tide, currently slack, would soon uncover. One could see the gentle undulations of the sea, broken against the rocky outcrops, unfolding there in long, foamy fringes. From this point to Cape Griffe, the beach was narrow and confined between the edge of the reefs and that of the forest.

The walk was therefore going to become more difficult, as countless fallen rocks cluttered the shoreline.

The granite wall also tended to rise higher and higher, and of the trees that crowned it behind, only the green tops could be seen, undisturbed by any breeze.

After a half-hour rest, the colonists resumed their journey, their eyes leaving no stone unturned on the reefs and the shore. Pencroff and Nab even ventured among the rocks whenever something caught their eye. But there was no shipwreck to be seen, and they were misled by some strange formation of the rocks. They were able to observe, however, that edible shellfish were plentiful on this beach, but it could only be profitably exploited once communication had been established

between the two banks of the Mercy, and also once the means of transport had been improved.

Thus, nothing related to the presumed shipwreck appeared on that coastline, and yet an object of some importance, the hull of a vessel for example, would have been visible then, or its wreckage would have been brought ashore, as had been the crate found less than twenty miles away. But there was nothing.

Around three o'clock, Cyrus Smith and his companions arrived at a narrow, well-enclosed cove, into which no stream flowed. It formed a veritable little natural harbor, invisible from the open sea, into which a narrow channel opened, formed by the reefs between them. At the head of this cove, some violent upheaval had torn through the rocky edge, and a gently sloping channel gave access to the upper plateau, which could be located less than ten miles from Cape Griffe, and, consequently, four miles as the crow flies from the Grande-vue plateau.

Gideon Spilett suggested to his companions that they stop there. They agreed, as the walk had whetted everyone's appetite, and although it wasn't dinnertime, no one refused the comfort of a piece of venison. This lunch would tide them over until supper at Granite House. A few minutes later, the colonists, seated at the foot of a magnificent cluster of

maritime pines, were devouring the provisions that Nab had taken from his knapsack.

The spot was elevated fifty to sixty feet above sea level. The field of vision was therefore quite extensive, and, passing over the last rocks of the cape, it extended as far as Union Bay. But neither the islet nor the plateau of Grande-Vue was visible, nor could it be at that time, for the terrain and the curtain of tall trees abruptly obscured the northern horizon.

Needless to say, despite the vast expanse of sea the explorers could survey, and although the engineer's telescope had traversed point by point along the entire circular line where sky and water merged, no ship was sighted. Similarly, along the entire remaining stretch of coastline, the telescope was moved with the same care from the shore to the reefs, and no wreck appeared within the instrument's field of view.

"Come now," said Gideon Spilett, "we must accept it and console ourselves with the thought that no one will come to dispute our possession of Lincoln Island!"

"But surely, this lead pellet!" said Harbert. "It's not imaginary, I suppose!"

"A thousand devils, no!" cried Pencroff, thinking of his missing jawbone.

"So what's the conclusion?" asked the reporter.

"This," replied the engineer, "is because, at most three months ago, a ship, whether intentionally or not, landed..."

"What! You would admit, Cyrus, that it disappeared without a trace?" exclaimed the reporter.

— No, my dear Spilett, but note that while it is certain that a human being set foot on this island, it seems no less certain that he has now left it.

"So, if I understand you correctly, Mr. Cyrus," said Harbert, "the ship has set sail again?"

- Obviously.

— And we would have lost an opportunity to return home? said Nab.

— I'm afraid there's no going back.

"Well then! Since the opportunity is lost, let's go," said Pencroff, who was already nostalgic for Granite-House.

But no sooner had he gotten up than Top's barking rang out loudly, and the dog came out of the woods, holding in its mouth a scrap of cloth soiled with mud.

Nab tore this piece of meat from the dog's mouth.

It was a piece of strong canvas.

Top was still barking, and, by his comings and goings, he seemed to be inviting his master to follow him into the forest.

"There's something there that could well explain my leaden state!" exclaimed Pencroff.

"A shipwrecked man!" replied Harbert.

— Injured, perhaps! said Nab.

"Or dead!" replied the reporter.

And they all rushed after the dog's tracks, between the tall pines that formed the first curtain of the forest. Just in case, Cyrus Smith and his companions had prepared their weapons.

They had to venture quite deep into the woods; but, to their great disappointment, they still saw no footprints. The undergrowth and vines were untouched, and they even had to cut them with an axe, as had been done in the deepest parts of the forest. It was therefore difficult to believe that a human creature had ever passed this way, and yet Top went back and forth, not like a dog searching at random, but like a being endowed with will, following an idea.

After walking for seven to eight minutes, Top stopped.

The settlers, having arrived at a sort of clearing bordered by tall trees, looked around them and saw nothing, neither under the bushes nor between the tree trunks.

"But what is it, Top?" said Cyrus Smith.

Top barked with more force, jumping at the foot of a gigantic pine tree.

Suddenly, Pencroff exclaimed:

"Ah! Good! Ah! Perfect!"

- Who is it? asked Gideon Spilett.

— We are looking for a shipwreck at sea or on land!

- Well?

"Well, she's up in the air!"

And the sailor showed a sort of large whitish rag, hanging from the top of the pine tree, and of which Top had brought back a piece that had fallen on the ground.

"But this is not a wreck!" cried Gideon Spilett.

"Apology!" replied Pencroff.

— What? Is it?...

"That's all that's left of our airship, our balloon that crashed up there, at the top of that tree!"

Pencroff was not mistaken, and he let out a magnificent hurrah, adding:

"Now that's some good cloth! Enough to provide us with linen for years! Enough to make handkerchiefs and shirts! Eh! Mr. Spilett, what do you say to an island where shirts grow on trees?"

It was truly a fortunate circumstance for the settlers of Lincoln Island that the balloon, after making its final leap through the air, had fallen back onto the island and that they had the chance to find it again.

Either they would keep the envelope in its current form, if they wished to attempt another escape by air, or they would make fruitful use of those few hundred ells of fine quality cotton cloth, once it had been stripped of its varnish. As one might well imagine, Pencroff's joy was unanimously and enthusiastically shared.

But this envelope had to be removed from the tree on which it hung, to be put in a safe place, and that was no small task. Nab, Harbert, and the sailor, having climbed to the top of the tree, had to perform wonders of skill to free the enormous deflated balloon.

The operation lasted nearly two hours, and not only the envelope, with its valve, springs, and copper lining, but also the net—that is, a considerable amount of rope and cordage—the retaining ring, and the

balloon's anchor were on the ground. The envelope, apart from the fracture, was in good condition, and only its lower end had been torn.

It was a fortune that had fallen from the sky.

“All the same, Mr. Cyrus,” said the sailor, “if we ever decide to leave the island, it won’t be by balloon, will it? Airships don’t go where you want them to, and we know a thing or two about that! You see, if you take my advice, we’ll build a good boat of about twenty tons, and you’ll let me cut a foresail and a jib out of this canvas. As for the rest, it’ll be for our clothes!”

"We shall see, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith, "we shall see."

“In the meantime, we must secure all of this,” said Nab. Indeed, transporting this considerable load of canvas, ropes, and cordage to Granite House was out of the question, and while awaiting a suitable vehicle to haul it, it was crucial not to leave these valuables any longer at the mercy of the first hurricane. The colonists, combining their efforts, managed to drag everything to the shore, where they discovered a rather large rocky cavity, protected from wind, rain, and sea thanks to its orientation.

"We needed a wardrobe, and we have one," said Pencroff; "but since it doesn't lock, it would be wise to conceal the opening. I'm not saying this for two-legged thieves, but for four-legged thieves!"

At six o'clock in the evening, everything was stored, and, after giving the small inlet that formed the cove the very justified name of "balloon harbor," they resumed their journey to Cape Griffe. Pencroff and the engineer discussed various projects that needed to be carried out as soon as possible. First and foremost, a bridge had to be built over the Mercy River to establish easy communication with the south of the island; then, the wagon would return to fetch the balloon, as the canoe would not have been sufficient to transport it; then, a decked longboat would be built; then, Pencroff would rig it as a cutter, and circumnavigation voyages could be undertaken... around the island; then, etc.

However, night was falling, and the sky was already dark, when the colonists reached the tip of the wreck, the very spot where they had discovered the precious crate. But there, as elsewhere, was nothing to indicate that any shipwreck had occurred, and they had to return to the conclusions previously drawn by Cyrus Smith. From the tip of the wreck to Granite House, there were still four miles to go, and they quickly covered them; but it was past midnight when, after following the shoreline to the mouth of the Mercy, the colonists arrived at the first bend in the river.

There, the bed measured a width of eighty feet, which was difficult to cross, but Pencroff had undertaken to overcome this difficulty, and he was ordered to do so.

Admittedly, the colonists were exhausted.

The journey had been long, and the balloon incident hadn't helped their legs and arms. They were therefore eager to get back to Granite House for supper and sleep, and if the bridge had been built, they would have been home in a quarter of an hour.

The night was very dark. Pencroff then prepared to keep his promise, building a kind of raft that would allow them to cross the Mercy. He and Nab, armed with axes, chose two trees near the bank, which they intended to use as a raft, and they began to attack them from their bases.

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett, sitting on the riverbank, waited for the right moment to help their companions, while Harbert walked back and forth, without straying too far.

Suddenly, the young boy, who had gone upriver, rushed back, pointing to the Mercy upstream:

"What is that thing drifting over there?" he exclaimed.

Pencroff interrupted his work, and he noticed a moving object that appeared indistinctly in the shadows.

"A canoe!" he said.

They all approached and, to their extreme surprise, saw a boat following the current.

"Oh! The canoe!" cried the sailor out of a remnant of professional habit, without thinking that perhaps it would have been better to remain silent.

No reply. The boat was still drifting, and was only about ten paces away, when the sailor cried out:

"But it's our canoe! It broke its mooring and went with the flow! You have to admit, it'll arrive just in time!"

"Our canoe?..." murmured the engineer.

Pencroff was right. It was indeed the canoe, whose mooring had broken, no doubt, and which was returning on its own from the sources of the Mercy! It was therefore important to seize it as it passed before it was carried by the rapid current of the river, beyond its mouth, and that is what Nab and Pencroff did skillfully by means of a long pole.

The boat reached the shore. The engineer, embarking first, grasped the mooring line and made sure by touch that this mooring line had

indeed been worn by its friction on rocks.

"There you have it," the reporter said to him in a low voice, "there you have it, that's what you might call a circumstance..."

"Strange!" replied Cyrus Smith.

Strange or not, she was happy! Harbert, the reporter, Nab and Pencroff embarked in their turn. They did not doubt that the mooring line had worn out; but the most astonishing thing about the affair was truly that the canoe had arrived just as the colonists were there to seize it as it passed, for, a quarter of an hour later, it would have been lost at sea.

If this had been the time of genies, this incident would have given reason to believe that the island was haunted by a supernatural being who used his power to help the shipwrecked! With a few strokes of the oars, the colonists reached the mouth of the Mercy River. The canoe was hauled ashore near the Chimneys, and they all headed towards the ladder at Granite House.

But, at that moment, Top barked angrily, and Nab, who was looking for the first rung, cried out... there was no more ladder.

CHAPTER VI

Cyrus Smith had stopped, without a word. His companions searched in the darkness, both on the walls, in case the wind had moved the ladder, and at ground level, in case it had come loose... but the ladder had completely disappeared. As for determining whether a gust of wind had lifted it to the first landing, halfway up the wall, that was impossible in the pitch black.

"If this is a joke," cried Pencroff, "it's a bad one! To arrive home and find no stairs to get to your room, that's not something to make tired people laugh!"

Nab, for his part, was lost in exclamations!

"But there was no wind!" Harbert observed.

"I'm beginning to think that some strange things are going on on Lincoln Island!" said Pencroff.

"Strange?" replied Gideon Spilett, "but no, Pencroff, nothing could be more natural. Someone came while we were away, took possession of the house, and removed the ladder!"

"Someone!" cried the sailor. "And who?"

"But the hunter with the lead shot," replied the reporter. "What would be the point of him, if not to explain our misadventure?"

“Well, if there’s anyone up there,” Pencroff replied, swearing, for impatience was beginning to overwhelm him, “I’ll call out to him, and he’ll have to answer.”

And in a thunderous voice, the sailor let out a prolonged "ahé!", which the echoes reverberated forcefully.

The settlers listened intently, and thought they heard a kind of sneering sound near Granite-House, the origin of which they could not identify.

But no voice answered Pencroff's voice, who repeated his vigorous call in vain.

There was truly something there that would astound even the most indifferent men in the world, and the colonists could not be among those indifferent. In their situation, every incident had its gravity, and certainly, in the seven months they had lived on the island, none had presented itself with such a surprising character.

In any case, forgetting their fatigue and overwhelmed by the singularity of the event, they stood at the foot of Granite House, not knowing what to think, not knowing what to do, questioning themselves without being able to answer, multiplying hypotheses, each more implausible than the last. Nab lamented, very disappointed at not being able to return to his kitchen, especially since their travel

provisions were exhausted and he had no way of replenishing them at the moment.

“My friends,” said Cyrus Smith, “we have only one thing to do: wait for daybreak, and then act according to the circumstances. But while we wait, let us go to the Chimneys. There we will be safe, and if we cannot eat supper, at least we can sleep.”

"But who is the shameless person who played this trick on us?" asked Pencroff again, unable to accept the situation.

Whatever the "discretion," the only thing to do, as the engineer had said, was to return to the Chimneys and wait there for daybreak. However, Top was ordered to remain beneath the windows of Granite House, and when Top received an order, Top carried it out without question. So the brave dog stayed at the foot of the wall while his master and companions took refuge among the rocks. To say that the colonists, despite their weariness, slept soundly on the sand at the Chimneys would be to distort the truth. Not only could they not have been very anxious about recognizing the significance of this new incident, whether it was the result of chance whose natural causes would become clear to them at daybreak, or, on the contrary, whether it was the work of a human being, but they were also sleeping very

poorly. In any case, one way or another, their home was occupied at the moment, and they could not return to it.

Granite House was more than just their home; it was their storehouse. All the colony's equipment was there: weapons, instruments, tools, ammunition, food supplies, and so on. If all of this were looted, the colonists would have to rebuild everything, remake their weapons and tools. A serious matter indeed! So, giving in to anxiety, one or the other of them went out every few minutes to see if Top was keeping a good watch. Only Cyrus Smith waited with his usual patience, although his tenacious reason was exasperated by the thought of being confronted with something utterly inexplicable, and he grew indignant at the thought that around him, perhaps even above him, an influence was at work that he couldn't name. Gideon Spilett entirely shared his opinion on this matter, and the two discussed several times, though in hushed tones, the inexplicable circumstances that confounded their perspicacity and experience. There was, without a doubt, a mystery on this island, and how could it be unraveled? Harbert, for his part, could only speculate and wished he could question Cyrus Smith.

As for Nab, he had finally decided that all this was none of his business, that it was his master's business, and, if he had not been afraid of offending his companions, the good negro would have slept

that night just as conscientiously as if he had rested on his bunk in Granite-House! Finally, more than all, Pencroff was enraged, and he was, in good faith, very angry.

"It's a joke," he said, "it's a joke they've played on us! Well, I don't like jokes, and woe to the joker if he falls into my hands!"

As soon as the first light of day appeared in the east, the colonists, properly armed, went to the shore, to the edge of the reefs.

Granite House, directly struck by the rising sun, was soon to be illuminated by the light of dawn, and indeed, before five o'clock, the windows, their shutters closed, appeared through their leafy curtains. From that perspective, all was in order, but a cry escaped the colonists' chests when they saw the door wide open, the door they had, however, locked before their departure. Someone had broken into Granite House. There was no longer any doubt about it.

The upper ladder, normally stretched from the landing to the door, was in its place; but the lower ladder had been removed and raised to the threshold. It was more than evident that the intruders had wanted to avoid any surprise.

As for recognizing their species and number, that was not yet possible, since none of them showed themselves.

Pencroff, alas, again.

No response.

"The wretches!" cried the sailor. "And look at them, sleeping peacefully, as if they owned the place! Ahoy! Pirates, bandits, corsairs, sons of John Bull!"

When Pencroff, in his capacity as an American, had called someone "son of John Bull", he had risen to the very limits of insult.

At that moment, day broke completely, and the facade of Granite-House was illuminated by the sun's rays. But, inside as outside, all was silent and calm.

The colonists were wondering whether Granite-House was occupied or not, and yet the position of the ladder sufficiently demonstrated it, and it was even certain that the occupants, whoever they were, could not have escaped! But how to reach them?

Harbert then had the idea of attaching a rope to an arrow and launching the arrow so that it would pass between the first rungs of the ladder, which hung at the threshold of the door. The ladder could then be lowered to the ground using the rope, thus re-establishing communication between the ground and Granite House.

There was obviously nothing else to be done, and, with a little skill, the method should succeed.

Fortunately, bows and arrows had been left in a corridor of the Chimneys, where there were also a few dozen fathoms of light hibiscus rope. Pencroff uncoiled this rope and fixed the end to a well-fletched arrow. Then, Harbert, after placing the arrow on his bow, carefully aimed at the dangling end of the ladder.

Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Pencroff, and Nab had withdrawn to the rear to observe what would happen at the windows of Granite House. The reporter, rifle slung over his shoulder, was aiming at the door.

The bow relaxed, the arrow whistled, pulling the string along, and came to pass between the last two rungs.

The operation had succeeded. Immediately, Harbert seized the end of the rope; but, at the moment he gave a jerk to make the ladder fall back down, an arm, passing quickly between the wall and the door, seized it and brought it back inside Granite-House.

"Triple wretch!" cried the sailor. "If a bullet can bring you happiness, you won't have to wait long!"

"But who is this?" asked Nab.

— Who? Didn't you recognize him?...

- No.

"But it's a monkey, a macaque, a capuchin monkey, a female monkey, an orangutan, a baboon, a gorilla, a pig! Our house has been invaded by monkeys, who climbed the ladder while we were away!"

And, at that moment, as if to prove the sailor right, three or four quadrupeds appeared at the windows, whose shutters they had pushed back, and greeted the true owners of the place with a thousand contortions and grimaces.

"I knew it was just a joke!" cried Pencroff, "but now one of the jokers will pay for the others!"

The sailor, shouldering his rifle, quickly took aim at one of the monkeys and fired. All disappeared except for one, which, mortally wounded, was thrown onto the shore.

This tall ape belonged to the first order of quadrupeds; there could be no mistaking it. Whether it was a chimpanzee, an orangutan, a gorilla, or a gibbon, it ranked among those anthropomorphic beings, so named because of their resemblance to human beings. Moreover, Harbert declared it to be an orangutan, and it is known that the young boy was knowledgeable in zoology.

"The magnificent beast!" exclaimed Nab.

"Magnificent, as long as you like!" replied Pencroff, "but I still don't see how we can get home!"

"Harbert is a good shot," said the reporter, "and his bow is right here! Let him try again..."

"Well! Those monkeys are clever!" cried Pencroff, "and they won't go back to the windows, and we won't be able to kill them, and when I think of the damage they can do in the rooms, in the shop..."

"Patience," replied Cyrus Smith. "These animals can't hold us off for long!"

“I won’t be sure until they’re ashore,” replied the sailor. “And first of all, do you know, Mr. Smith, how many dozens of those jokers there are up there?”

It would have been difficult to answer Pencroff, and as for repeating the young boy's attempt, it was not easy, because the lower end of the ladder had been brought back inside the door, and, when they pulled again on the rope, the rope broke and the ladder did not fall back down.

The case was truly embarrassing. Pencroff was furious. The situation had a certain comical aspect, which he, for one, did not find funny at all.

It was obvious that the settlers would eventually return to their home and drive out the intruders, but when and how? That was what they couldn't say. Two hours passed, during which the monkeys avoided showing themselves; but they were still there, and three or four times, a

snout or a paw slipped through the door or windows, which were greeted with gunshots.

"Let's hide," said the engineer. "Perhaps the monkeys will think we've left and let themselves be seen again. But let Spilett and Harbert lie in ambush behind the rocks, and fire on anything that appears."

The engineer's orders were carried out, and while the reporter and the young boy, the colony's two most skilled marksmen, took up positions within easy range but out of the monkeys' sight, Nab, Pencroff, and Cyrus Smith climbed the plateau and entered the forest to hunt some game, for lunchtime had arrived, and there was nothing left in terms of provisions. After half an hour, the hunters returned with some rock pigeons, which they roasted as best they could. Not a single monkey had reappeared.

Gideon Spilett and Harbert went to have their share of lunch while Top kept watch beneath the windows. Then, after eating, they returned to their posts. Two hours later, the situation had not changed in the slightest. The quadrupeds gave no further sign of existence, and it was as if they had vanished; but what seemed most likely was that, frightened by the death of one of their own, terrified by the gunfire, they were lying silent in the depths of the rooms of Granite House, or even in the storehouse. And when one considered the riches contained

in that storehouse, the patience so strongly recommended by the engineer eventually degenerated into violent irritation, and frankly, with good reason.

"This is just too stupid," the reporter finally said, "and there's really no reason for it to end!"

"We must drive those scoundrels out!" cried Pencroff. "We could easily take them down, even if there were twenty of them, but to do that, we have to fight them hand-to-hand! Ah! Isn't there any way to get to them?"

"Yes," replied the engineer, an idea having just crossed his mind.

"One?" said Pencroff. "Well, that's the right one, since there aren't any others! And what is it?"

"Let's try to get back down to Granite-House by way of the old spillway of the lake," replied the engineer.

"Ah! A thousand and one devils!" cried the sailor. "And I didn't even think of that!"

This was, in fact, the only way to get into Granite House, to fight the gang and drive them out. The spillway opening was, admittedly, blocked by a wall of cemented stones, which would have to be sacrificed, but they would only have to rebuild it. Fortunately, Cyrus Smith had not yet

carried out his plan to conceal this opening by flooding it with the lake, for then the operation would have taken some time.

It was already past noon when the colonists, well armed and equipped with picks and shovels, left the Chimneys, passed under the windows of Granite-House, after ordering Top to remain at his post, and prepared to go up the left bank of the Mercy, in order to reach the plateau of Great-view.

But they hadn't gone fifty steps in that direction when they heard the dog's furious barking. It was like a desperate cry.

They stopped.

"Let's run!" said Pencroff.

And they all ran back down the riverbank at full speed.

Reaching the turning point, they saw that the situation had changed. Indeed, the monkeys, seized by a sudden terror, brought on by some unknown cause, were trying to escape. Two or three were running and jumping from window to window with the agility of clowns. They weren't even trying to replace the ladder, by which it would have been easy for them to climb down, and, in their fright, perhaps they had forgotten this means of escape. Soon, five or six were in position to be shot, and the colonists, taking easy aim, opened fire. Some, wounded or killed, fell back into the rooms, uttering shrill cries. Others, hurled

outside, shattered in their fall, and, a few moments later, it could be assumed that there wasn't a single living quadruped left in Granite House.

"Hurrah!" cried Pencroff, "hurrah! Hurrah!"

— Not so much hurrah! said Gideon Spilett.

"Why? They're all dead," replied the sailor.

— Okay, but that doesn't give us a way to get home.

"Let's go to the spillway!" replied Pencroff.

"No doubt," said the engineer. "However, it would have been preferable..."

At that moment, and as if in response to Cyrus Smith's observation, the ladder was seen sliding across the doorway, then unrolling and falling back to the ground.

"Ah! A thousand pipes! That's strong!" exclaimed the sailor, looking at Cyrus Smith.

"Too strong!" murmured the engineer, who was the first to jump up the ladder.

"Beware, Mr. Cyrus!" cried Pencroff, "if there are still some of those scoundrels..."

"We'll see," replied the engineer without stopping.

All his companions followed him, and in a minute they had arrived at the threshold of the door.

We searched everywhere. No one was in the rooms, nor in the shop which had been left undisturbed by the gang of quadrupeds.

"Ah, and what about the ladder?" exclaimed the sailor. "Who was the gentleman who sent it back to us?"

But at that moment, a cry was heard, and a large monkey, which had taken refuge in the corridor, rushed into the room, pursued by Nab.

"Ah! The bandit!" cried Pencroff.

And with the axe in his hand, he was about to split the animal's head open when Cyrus Smith stopped him and said:

"Spare him, Pencroff."

— Should I spare this dark-skinned man?

"Yes! He's the one who threw the ladder at us!"

And the engineer said this in such a peculiar voice that it would have been difficult to know whether he was speaking seriously or not.

Nevertheless, they rushed at the monkey, who, after defending himself valiantly, was overpowered and bound.

"Phew!" cried Pencroff. "And what are we going to do with it now?"

"A servant!" replied Harbert.

And in speaking thus, the young boy was not entirely joking, for he knew the advantage that could be taken from this intelligent race of quadrupeds.

The colonists then approached the monkey and examined it closely. It clearly belonged to that species of anthropomorphic monkey whose facial angle is not significantly smaller than that of Australians and Khoikhoi. It was an orangutan, and as such, it possessed neither the ferocity of the baboon, nor the thoughtlessness of the macaque, nor the filthiness of the pig, nor the impatience of the Barbary macaque, nor the base instincts of the cynocephalus. It is to this family of anthropomorphic monkeys that so many traits belong which indicate in these animals a near-human intelligence. Employed in households, they can serve at table, clean rooms, care for clothes, polish shoes, handle knives, spoons, and forks skillfully, and even drink wine... just as well as the best two-legged, featherless servant. It is known that Buffon owned one of these monkeys, which served him for a long time as a faithful and zealous servant.

The man then bound in the Granite House hall was a tall devil, six feet high, admirably proportioned, with a broad chest, a medium-sized head, a facial angle reaching sixty-five degrees, a rounded skull, a prominent nose, and skin covered with smooth, glossy hair—in short, a

perfect example of an anthropomorphic being. His eyes, somewhat smaller than human eyes, shone with intelligent vivacity; his white teeth gleamed beneath his mustache, and he wore a small, curly, hazel-colored beard.

"A handsome fellow!" said Pencroff. "If only we knew his language, we could talk to him!"

"So," said Nab, "is this serious, my master? Are we going to take him on as a servant?"

"Yes, Nab," the engineer replied with a smile. "But don't be jealous!"

"And I hope he will make an excellent servant," added Harbert. "He seems young, his training will be easy, and we will not be obliged to use force to subdue him, nor to pull out his canines, as is done in such circumstances! He can only become attached to masters who will be good to him."

"And we will be," replied Pencroff, who had forgotten all his resentment against "the jokers."

Then, approaching the orange:

"Well, my boy," he asked him, "how are things?"

The orange responded with a small grunt that didn't suggest too much bad humor.

"So we want to be part of the colony?" asked the sailor. "So we are going to enter the service of Mr. Cyrus Smith?"

The monkey grunts approvingly again.

"And we will be satisfied with our food as our only pledge?"

Third affirmative grunt.

"His conversation is a bit monotonous," observed Gideon Spilett.

“Good!” replied Pencroff, “the best servants are those who talk the least. And besides, no wages!” “Do you hear me, my boy? To begin with, we won’t give you any wages, but we’ll double them later if we’re pleased with you!”

Thus the colony gained a new member, who was to render it more than one service.

As for the name by which he should be called, the sailor asked that, in memory of another monkey he had known, he be called Jupiter, and Jup for short.

And that's how, without further ado, Master Jup was installed at Granite-House.

CHAPTER VII

The settlers of Lincoln Island had thus reclaimed their home without having to follow the old spillway, which spared them the work of building a masonry structure. It was fortunate, in fact, that just as they were about to do so, the band of monkeys was seized by a terror, no less sudden than it was inexplicable, which drove them from Granite House. Had these animals sensed that a serious assault was about to be launched against them from another direction? This was practically the only way to interpret their retreat.

During the last hours of that day, the monkeys' corpses were transported to the woods, where they were buried; then the colonists set about repairing the disorder caused by the intruders—disorder and not damage, for if they had upset the furniture in the rooms, at least they had not broken anything.

Nab reignited his stoves, and the storeroom's provisions provided a substantial meal which everyone thoroughly enjoyed.

Jup was not forgotten, and he ate with relish the pine nuts and rhyome roots, of which he was abundantly supplied. Pencroff had untied his arms, but he deemed it appropriate to leave him in shackles until he could count on his resignation.

Then, before going to bed, Cyrus Smith and his companions, sitting around the table, discussed some projects whose execution was urgent.

The most important and urgent were the establishment of a bridge over the Mercy, in order to put the southern part of the island in communication with Granite-House, and then the foundation of a corral, intended for the housing of mouflon or other woolly animals that needed to be captured.

As we can see, these two projects aimed to solve the question of clothing, which was then the most serious issue. Indeed, the bridge would facilitate the transport of the balloon envelope, which would provide the linen, and the corral was intended to supply the wool harvest, which would provide winter clothing.

As for this corral, Cyrus Smith intended to establish it at the very source of Red Creek, where ruminants would find pastures providing them with fresh and abundant food. The road between the Grande-vue plateau and the source was already partially cleared, and with a wagon better equipped than the first, transport would be easier, especially if some draft animals could be captured.

But while there was no problem with the corral being located away from Granite House, the same could not be said of the poultry yard, to which Nab drew the settlers' attention. It was essential that the birds be within easy reach of the cook, and no location seemed more suitable for establishing the poultry yard than that stretch of the lake shore

bordering the old spillway. Waterfowl would thrive there as well as any other, and the pair of tinamous captured on the last excursion was to serve as a first attempt at domestication.

The following day, — November 3, — the new work began with the construction of the bridge, and all hands were required for this important task.

Saws, axes, chisels, hammers were loaded onto the shoulders of the settlers, who, transformed into carpenters, went down to the shore.

At this point, Pencroff made a remark:

"And what if, during our absence, Master Jup were to take it into his head to remove that ladder which he so gallantly returned to us yesterday?"

"Let's subdue it by its lower end," replied Cyrus Smith.

This was done by means of two stakes, firmly driven into the sand. Then, the settlers, going up the left bank of the Mercy, soon arrived at the bend formed by the river.

There they stopped to consider whether the bridge should be built at that location. The spot seemed suitable. Indeed, from that point to Ballon Harbour, discovered the day before on the south coast, there was only a distance of three and a half miles, and from the bridge to the

harbour it would be easy to build a carriage road, which would make communication easy between Granite House and the south of the island.

Cyrus Smith then shared with his companions a project that was both very simple to execute and very advantageous, which he had been considering for some time.

The aim was to completely isolate the Grande-vue plateau, thus protecting it from any attack by quadrupeds or quadrumas. In this way, Granite-House, the Chimneys, the farmyard, and the entire upper part of the plateau, intended for sowing, would be protected from animal depredation.

Nothing could have been easier to execute than this project, and here is how the engineer planned to operate.

The plateau was already defended on three sides by watercourses, either artificial or natural: to the northwest, by the shore of Grant Lake, from the angle abutting the opening of the old spillway to the cut made on the eastern shore of the lake for the escape of the waters; to the north, from this cut to the sea, by the new watercourse which had carved a bed on the plateau and on the shore, upstream and downstream of the falls, and it was sufficient, in fact, to dig the bed of this creek to make the passage impassable for animals; on the entire

eastern edge, by the sea itself, from the mouth of the aforementioned creek to the mouth of the Mercy; to the south, finally, from this mouth to the bend of the Mercy where the bridge was to be built.

Thus remained the western part of the plateau, between the bend in the river and the southern corner of the lake, a distance of less than a mile, which was open to all. But nothing was easier than digging a wide and deep ditch, which would be filled with the lake's waters, and whose overflow would plunge through a second waterfall into the Mercy River. The lake's level would undoubtedly drop somewhat as a result of this additional outflow, but Cyrus Smith had recognized that the flow of Red Creek was considerable enough to allow the execution of his plan.

“Thus,” added the engineer, “the Grande-vue plateau will be a veritable island, being surrounded by water on all sides, and it will communicate with the rest of our domain only by the bridge we are going to build over the Mercy, the two culverts already established upstream and downstream of the falls, and finally two other culverts to be built, one over the ditch I propose you dig, and the other on the left bank of the Mercy. Now, if these bridges and culverts can be raised at will, the Grande-vue plateau will be safe from any surprises.”

Cyrus Smith, in order to make himself better understood by his companions, had drawn a map of the plateau, and his plan was

immediately grasped in its entirety. Thus, a unanimous opinion approved it, and Pencroff, brandishing his carpenter's axe, exclaimed:

"To the bridge first!"

This was the most urgent task. Trees were selected, felled, lopped, and cut into beams, planks, and beams. This bridge, fixed in the section resting on the right bank of the Mercy, was to be movable in the section connecting to the left bank, so that it could be raised by means of counterweights, like some lock bridges.

Understandably, it was a considerable undertaking, and while skillfully executed, it certainly took some time, as the Mercy River was approximately eighty feet wide. It was therefore necessary to drive piles into the riverbed to support the fixed deck of the bridge, and to install a bell mechanism to operate the pile heads, which would thus form two arches and allow the bridge to bear heavy loads.

Fortunately, there was no shortage of tools for working the wood, nor of ironwork to reinforce it, nor of the ingenuity of a man who was wonderfully skilled in these tasks, nor finally of the zeal of his companions, who, for seven months, had necessarily acquired great manual dexterity.

And it must be said, Gideon Spilett was not the most clumsy and was vying skillfully with the sailor himself, "who would never have expected

so much from a mere journalist!"

The construction of the Mercy Bridge lasted three weeks, which were very seriously spent. Lunch was eaten right there on the construction site, and, the weather being magnificent at the time, they only returned to Granite-House for supper.

During this period, it was observed that Master Jup was easily adapting and becoming familiar with his new masters, whom he always regarded with great curiosity. However, as a precaution, Pencroff was not yet allowing him complete freedom of movement, wanting to wait, quite rightly, until the boundaries of the plateau had been made impassable as a result of the planned construction work. Top and Jup were getting along famously and enjoyed playing together, but Jup did everything very seriously.

On November 20th, the bridge was finished. Its movable part, balanced by counterweights, tilted easily, and only a slight effort was needed to raise it; between its hinge and the last crossbeam on which it rested when closed, there was a gap of twenty feet, which was wide enough that animals could not cross it.

The discussion then turned to retrieving the balloon's envelope, which the colonists were eager to secure; but transporting it required driving a wagon to Port Ballon, and consequently, forging a route

through the dense forests of the Far West. This would take some time. Therefore, Nab and Pencroff first made a reconnaissance to the port, and as they found that the "canvas stockpile" was undamaged in the cave where it had been stored, it was decided that work on the Grande-vue plateau would continue uninterrupted.

"This," observed Pencroff, "will allow us to establish our poultry yard in better conditions, since we will not have to fear either the visit of foxes or the aggression of other harmful animals."

"Not to mention," added Nab, "that we can clear the plateau, transplant wild plants there..."

"And prepare our second wheat field!" cried the sailor triumphantly.

Indeed, the first wheat field, sown with only one grain, had prospered admirably, thanks to Pencroff's care. It had produced the ten ears announced by the engineer, and, each ear bearing eighty grains, the colony found itself at the head of eight hundred grains — in six months — which promised a double harvest each year.

These eight hundred grains, less about fifty, which were reserved for prudence, were therefore to be sown in a new field, and with no less care than the single grain.

The field was prepared, then surrounded by a strong, high, and sharp palisade that quadrupeds would have found very difficult to cross. As

for the birds, noisy turnstiles and frightening dummies, the product of Pencroff's whimsical imagination, were enough to keep them away. The seven hundred and fifty grains were then sown in small, perfectly regular furrows, and nature was left to do the rest.

On November 21, Cyrus Smith began to draw the outline of the trench that was to close off the plateau to the west, from the southern corner of Grant Lake to the bend in the Mercy River. There were two to three feet of topsoil there, and below it, granite. Nitroglycerin had to be prepared again, and it had its usual effect. In less than fifteen days, a trench twelve feet wide and six feet deep was cut into the hard plateau soil. A new channel was cut, using the same method, at the rocky edge of the lake, and the waters rushed into this new channel, forming a small stream which was named "Glycerine Creek" and which became a tributary of the Mercy. As the engineer had predicted, the lake level dropped, but almost imperceptibly. Finally, to complete the enclosure, the bed of the stream on the shore was considerably widened, and the sands were held in place by means of a double palisade.

With the first half of December, these works were definitively completed, and the Grande-vue plateau, that is to say a sort of irregular pentagon with a perimeter of about four miles, surrounded by a liquid belt, was absolutely safe from any aggression.

During that month of December, the heat was very intense. However, the colonists did not want to suspend the execution of their projects, and, as it became urgent to organize the farmyard, they proceeded to do so.

Needless to say, since the plateau had been completely closed, Master Jup had been set free. He never left his masters' side and showed no inclination to escape. He was a gentle animal, yet very vigorous, and surprisingly agile. Ah! When it came to climbing the ladder at Granite House, no one could have rivaled him. He was already put to work: hauling loads of wood and transporting the stones that had been extracted from the bed of Glycerine Creek.

"He's not a mason yet, but he's already a monkey!" Harbert joked, alluding to the nickname "monkey" that masons give their apprentices. And if ever a name was justified, it was that one!

The farmyard occupied an area of two hundred square yards, which was chosen on the southeast shore of the lake.

It was surrounded by a palisade, and various shelters were built for the animals that were to inhabit it. These were huts made of branches, divided into compartments, which soon awaited only their inhabitants.

The first arrivals were the pair of tinamous, who soon had many chicks. They were joined by half a dozen ducks, regulars on the lake's

shores. Some belonged to that Chinese breed whose wings fan out, and whose plumage, with its brilliance and vibrancy, rivals that of golden pheasants. A few days later, Harbert captured a pair of gallinaceous birds with rounded tails and long feathers, magnificent alectors, which quickly became tame. As for the pelicans, kingfishers, and moorhens, they came of their own accord to the shore of the farmyard, and this whole little world, after a few squabbles, cooing, chirping, and clucking, finally got along and grew to a reassuring size for the colony's future food supply.

Cyrus Smith, also wanting to complete his work, established a dovecote in a corner of the farmyard.

A dozen of these pigeons, which frequented the high rocks of the plateau, were housed there. These birds easily became accustomed to returning each evening to their new home and showed a greater propensity for domestication than their wood pigeon relatives, which, moreover, only reproduce in the wild. Finally, the time had come to use the balloon's envelope for making linen, for keeping it in that form and risking leaving the island in a hot air balloon, above a virtually boundless sea, would only have been conceivable for people who had lacked everything, and Cyrus Smith, a practical man, could not even consider such a thing.

The task at hand was to return the envelope to Granite House, and the colonists set about making their heavy wagon more maneuverable and lighter. But while the vehicle itself was available, an engine was still needed! Was there no native ruminant on the island that could replace a horse, donkey, ox, or cow? That was the question.

“In truth,” said Pencroff, “a draft animal would be very useful to us, until Mr. Cyrus is willing to build a steam carriage, or even a locomotive, for certainly, one day, we will have a railway from Granite House to Port Ballon, with a branch line to Mount Franklin!”

And the honest sailor, speaking thus, believed what he said! Oh! Imagination, when faith gets involved!

But, to avoid exaggeration, a simple four-legged animal would have sufficed for Pencroff, and since Providence had a soft spot for him, it didn't keep him waiting. One day, on December 23rd, they heard both Nab shouting and Top barking loudly. The settlers, busy at the Chimneys, rushed over immediately, fearing some unfortunate incident. What did they see? Two fine, large animals that had imprudently ventured onto the plateau, whose culverts had not been closed. They looked like two horses, or at least two donkeys, male and female, slender builds, dun coats, white legs and tails, striped with black on their heads, necks, and bodies. They advanced calmly, without showing

any anxiety, and they looked with keen eyes at these men, in whom they could not yet recognize masters.

"They are onaggas!" cried Harbert, "quadrupeds that are somewhere between a zebra and a quagga!"

"Why not donkeys?" asked Nab.

— Because they don't have long ears and their shapes are more graceful!

"Donkeys or horses," retorted Pencroff, "they are 'engines,' as Mr. Smith would say, and as such, good to be captured!"

The sailor, without frightening the two animals, slipped between the grasses to the culvert of the Creek-Glycérine, tipped it over, and the onaggas were trapped.

Now, would we seize them by force and subject them to forced domestication? No.

It was decided that, for a few days, they would be allowed to come and go freely on the plateau, where the grass was plentiful, and immediately the engineer had a stable built near the farmyard, in which the onaggas would find, with good bedding, a refuge during the night.

Thus, this magnificent couple was left entirely free to move about, and the colonists even avoided frightening them by approaching.

Several times, however, the onaggas seemed to feel the need to leave this plateau, too confined for them, accustomed as they were to wide open spaces and deep forests. They could then be seen following the ring of water which presented them with an insurmountable barrier, uttering a few sharp brays, then galloping through the grasses, and, when calm returned, they would remain for hours contemplating these great woods which were closed to them without return!

However, harnesses and traces made of plant fibers had been fashioned, and a few days after the onaggas were captured, not only was the wagon ready to be harnessed, but a straight road, or rather a cut, had been made through the Far West forest, from the bend of the Mercy River to Balloon Harbor. The wagon could therefore be driven along it, and it was toward the end of December that the onaggas were first tested.

Pencroff had already sufficiently tamed these animals to eat from his hand, and they allowed themselves to be approached without difficulty, but once harnessed, they reared up, and it was very difficult to restrain them. However, they were not long in adapting to this new task, for the onagga, less unruly than the zebra, is frequently harnessed in the mountainous regions of southern Africa, and it has even been successfully acclimatized in Europe in relatively cold areas.

That day, the entire colony, except for Pencroff, who walked at the head of his animals, climbed into the wagon and set off for Port Ballon. It goes without saying that the journey on this barely constructed road was bumpy; but the vehicle arrived without incident, and that same day, the envelope and various fittings of the balloon were loaded onto it.

At eight o'clock in the evening, the wagon, having crossed the Mercy Bridge again, descended the left bank of the river and stopped on the shore. The onaggas were unharnessed and then led back to their stable, and Pencroff, before falling asleep, let out a sigh of satisfaction that made the echoes of Granite House resound loudly.

CHAPTER VIII

The first week of January was devoted to making the linen needed for the colony. The needles found in the crate worked in the hands of strong, if not delicate, fingers, and it can be said that what was sewn was sewn securely.

Thread was plentiful, thanks to Cyrus Smith's idea of reusing the one that had already been used to sew the balloon's bands. These long strips were unstitched with admirable patience by Gideon Spilett and Harbert, as Pencroff had been forced to abandon this task, which annoyed him excessively; but when it came to sewing, he was unrivaled.

Indeed, everyone knows that sailors have a remarkable aptitude for the art of sewing.

The canvases that made up the balloon's envelope were then degreased using soda and potash obtained by burning plants, so that the cotton, freed from the varnish, regained its natural suppleness and elasticity; then, subjected to the bleaching action of the atmosphere, it acquired a perfect whiteness. Several dozen shirts and socks—the latter not knitted, of course, but made of sewn canvas—were thus prepared. What a joy it was for the colonists to finally wear white linen—very rough linen, no doubt, but they weren't worried about such trifles—and to lie down between sheets that transformed the bunks at Granite House into perfectly respectable beds.

It was also around this time that shoes made of sealskin were produced, which conveniently replaced the shoes and boots brought from America. These new shoes were wide and long and never hindered the feet of walkers!

With the start of 1866, the heat was persistent, but the hunt in the woods did not cease. Agoutis, peccaries, capybaras, kangaroos, game animals both furred and feathered were truly abundant, and Gideon Spilett and Harbert were too good shots to miss a single shot from now on.

Cyrus Smith always advised them to conserve ammunition, and he took steps to replace the powder and lead that had been found in the crate, which he wanted to reserve for the future.

Did he know, in fact, where chance might one day throw him and his family, in the event that they left their domain? It was therefore necessary to prepare for all the necessities of the unknown, and to conserve ammunition, by substituting other easily renewable substances.

To replace lead, of which Cyrus Smith had found no trace on the island, he used iron shot, which was easy to manufacture, without too much disadvantage. Since these grains did not have the weight of lead shot, he had to make them larger, and each charge contained fewer, but the hunters' skill compensated for this shortcoming. As for gunpowder, Cyrus Smith could have made his own, as he had saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal at his disposal; but this preparation requires extreme care, and without specialized equipment, it is difficult to produce it of good quality.

Cyrus Smith therefore preferred to manufacture pyroxylin, that is, fulmi-cotton, a substance in which cotton is not essential, since it is only present as cellulose. Now, cellulose is nothing other than the basic building block of plants, and it is found in a nearly pure form not only in

cotton, but also in the textile fibers of hemp and flax, in paper, old linen, elder pith, etc. And indeed, elder trees were abundant on the island, near the mouth of Red Creek, and the colonists were already using the berries of these shrubs, which belong to the honeysuckle family, as a substitute for coffee.

Thus, this elder pith, that is to say the cellulose, it was enough to harvest it, and, as for the other substance necessary for the manufacture of pyroxylin, it was only fuming nitric acid.

Now, Cyrus Smith, having sulfuric acid at his disposal, had already been able to easily produce nitric acid by attacking the saltpeter that nature provided him.

He therefore resolved to manufacture and use pyroxylin, while acknowledging its rather serious drawbacks: a highly uneven effect, excessive flammability (since it ignites at 170 degrees Celsius instead of 240), and finally, an overly instantaneous deflagration that can damage firearms. On the other hand, pyroxylin's advantages lay in the fact that it was not affected by humidity, that it did not foul gun barrels, and that its propellant force was four times that of ordinary gunpowder.

To make pyroxylin, simply immerse cellulose in fuming nitric acid for fifteen minutes, then wash thoroughly with water and dry. As you can see, nothing could be simpler.

Cyrus Smith had at his disposal only ordinary nitric acid, not fuming or monohydrated nitric acid—that is, the acid that emits whitish vapors upon contact with humid air. But by substituting ordinary nitric acid, mixed in a ratio of three parts to five parts concentrated sulfuric acid, for the latter, the engineer was able to obtain the same result, and he did. The island's hunters thus soon had at their disposal a perfectly prepared substance, which, used judiciously, yielded excellent results.

Around this time, the settlers cleared three acres of the Grande-vue plateau, and the rest was left as pasture for the onaggas. Several excursions were made into the Jacamar and Far-West forests, and a veritable harvest of wild plants was brought back—spinach, cress, horseradish, turnips—which intelligent cultivation would soon modify and which would temper the nitrogen-rich diet to which the settlers of Lincoln Island had hitherto been subjected. Significant quantities of wood and charcoal were also transported. Each excursion was, at the same time, a means of improving the roads, whose pavement was gradually compacting under the wheels of the wagon.

The warren always supplied its share of rabbits to the Granite House offices. As it was situated a little outside the point where Glycerine Creek began, its inhabitants could not enter the reserved plateau, nor consequently ravage the newly planted crops. As for the oyster bed,

located amidst the beach rocks and whose produce was frequently replenished, it yielded excellent shellfish daily. In addition, fishing, whether in the lake or in the Mercy River, soon proved fruitful, for Pencroff had set up bottom lines, armed with iron hooks, which frequently caught fine trout and certain extremely tasty fish whose silvery flanks were speckled with small yellowish spots. Thus, Master Nab, in charge of the cooking, was able to pleasantly vary the menu at each meal. The only thing missing from the colonists' table was bread, and, as has been said, it was a deprivation to which they were truly sensitive.

Around this time, they also hunted sea turtles, which frequented the beaches of Cape Mandible. In this area, the shore was covered with small mounds containing perfectly spherical eggs with hard, white shells, whose albumen had the property of not coagulating like that of bird eggs. The sun was responsible for hatching them, and their numbers were naturally very considerable, since each turtle can lay up to two hundred and fifty eggs annually.

"A veritable field of eggs," observed Gideon Spilett, "and all we have to do is collect them."

But they weren't content with just the products; they also hunted down the producers, a hunt that brought back to Granite-House a dozen

of these turtles, truly highly prized from a culinary point of view. The turtle broth, seasoned with aromatic herbs and garnished with a few cruciferous vegetables, often drew well-deserved praise for Master Nab, its preparer.

Another fortunate circumstance must be mentioned here, which allowed for the creation of new reserves for the winter. Schools of salmon ventured into the Mercy River and swam upstream for several miles. This was the time of year when the females, searching for suitable spawning grounds, preceded the males and made a great noise through the freshwater. A thousand of these fish, some measuring up to two and a half feet in length, thus flooded into the river, and it was enough to build a few dams to retain a large number of them. Several hundred were caught in this way, salted, and stored for the time when winter, freezing the waterways, would make all fishing impossible.

It was at this time that the very intelligent Jup was promoted to the position of valet. He was dressed in a jacket, short white linen breeches, and an apron whose pockets were his delight, for he would stuff his hands into them and would not allow anyone to rummage through them. The clever orange man had been marvelously styled by Nab, and it seemed as if the black man and the monkey understood each other when they conversed. Jup, moreover, had a genuine affection for Nab,

and Nab reciprocated it. Unless his services were needed, either to haul wood or to climb to the top of some tree, Jup spent most of his time in the kitchen and tried to imitate Nab in everything he saw him do. The master, moreover, showed extreme patience and even zeal in instructing his pupil, and the pupil displayed remarkable intelligence in taking advantage of the lessons given to him by his master.

Imagine, then, the satisfaction that Master Jup brought to the guests at Granite House one day when, napkin over his arm, he came unannounced to serve them at their table. Skillful and attentive, he performed his service with perfect dexterity, changing plates, bringing dishes, pouring drinks, all with a seriousness that greatly amused the colonists and delighted Pencroff.

"Jup, soup!"

— Jup, a little agouti!

— Jup, a plate!

"Jup! Brave Jup! Honest Jup!"

That was all anyone heard, and Jup, without ever being disconcerted, answered everything, took care of everything, and he nodded his intelligent head when Pencroff, repeating his joke from the first day, said to him:

"It seems, Jup, we'll have to double your wages!"

Needless to say, the orangutan was by then completely acclimated to Granite House, and often accompanied his masters into the forest, never showing any inclination to run away. You should have seen him then, walking in the most amusing way, with a cane Pencroff had made for him, which he carried over his shoulder like a rifle! If someone needed to pick some fruit from the top of a tree, how quickly he was up there! If the wagon wheel happened to get stuck in the mud, with what vigor Jup, with a single shove of his shoulder, would get it right again!

"What a fellow!" Pencroff often exclaimed. "If he were as wicked as he is good, there would be no way to defeat him!"

It was towards the end of January that the settlers undertook major works in the central part of the island. It had been decided that, near the sources of Red Creek, at the foot of Mount Franklin, a corral would be built, intended to contain the ruminants, whose presence would have been troublesome at Granite House, and more particularly these bighorn sheep, which were to provide the wool for making winter clothing.

Each morning, the colony, sometimes the whole colony, but more often represented only by Cyrus Smith, Harbert, and Pencroff, went to the sources of the creek, and, with the help of the onaggas, it was now

only a five-mile walk under a canopy of greenery along this newly laid-out road, which took the name of "Corral Road."

There, a large site had been chosen, on the very back of the mountain's southern ridge. It was a meadow, dotted with clumps of trees, situated at the foot of a buttress that enclosed it on one side. A small stream, rising on its slopes, flowed diagonally across it before emptying into Red Creek. The grass was fresh, and the scattered trees allowed air to circulate freely across its surface. It would therefore suffice to enclose the meadow with a circular palisade, resting at each end on the buttress, and high enough to prevent even the most agile animals from crossing it. This enclosure could contain, along with a hundred horned animals—bighorn sheep or wild goats—the young that would be born thereafter.

The perimeter of the corral was therefore marked out by the engineer, and the trees needed for the construction of the palisade had to be felled; but, as the digging of the road had already required the sacrifice of a certain number of trunks, they were hauled away, and they provided about a hundred stakes, which were firmly planted in the ground.

At the front of the palisade, a fairly wide entrance was made and closed by a double-leaf door made of strong planks, which were to be

reinforced by external bars.

The construction of this corral took no less than three weeks, because, in addition to the palisade work, Cyrus Smith erected vast wooden sheds under which the ruminants could take refuge.

Moreover, it had been necessary to build these structures with extreme solidity, because mouflons are robust animals, and their initial aggression was to be feared. The stakes, pointed at their upper end, which was hardened by fire, had been joined together by means of bolted crossbeams, and, at intervals, props ensured the solidity of the whole.

With the corral completed, the next step was to conduct a large drive hunt at the foot of Mount Franklin, amidst the pastures frequented by ruminants. This took place on February 7th, a beautiful summer day, and everyone participated. The two onaggas, already quite well-trained and ridden by Gideon Spilett and Harbert, proved invaluable in this endeavor.

The maneuver consisted solely of driving the mouflons and goats, gradually tightening the circle of the drive around them. So Cyrus Smith, Pencroff, Nab, and Jup positioned themselves at various points in the woods, while the two riders and Top galloped within a half-mile radius of the corral.

Mouflons were numerous in this part of the island. These beautiful animals, as large as deer, with horns stronger than those of a ram, and a greyish fleece mixed with long hairs, resembled argali sheep.

It was a tiring day of hunting! So much running back and forth, so many chases and counter-chases, so many shouts! Of the hundred or so mouflon driven towards the corral, more than two-thirds escaped the beaters; but, in the end, about thirty of these ruminants and a dozen wild goats, gradually driven back towards the corral, whose open gate seemed to offer them an escape, threw themselves in and were able to be imprisoned. All in all, the result was satisfactory, and the settlers had no cause for complaint. Most of these mouflon were females, some of which were expected to give birth soon. It was therefore certain that the herd would thrive, and that not only wool, but also hides would be plentiful in the not-too-distant future.

That evening, the hunters returned exhausted to Granite House. However, the next day, they went back to inspect the corral. The prisoners had tried to knock down the palisade, but they had not succeeded, and they soon became more peaceful.

During that month of February, nothing of importance occurred. Daily work continued methodically, and, while the roads to the corral and Ballon Harbor were being improved, a third road was begun, which,

starting from the enclosure, led towards the west coast. The still unexplored portion of Lincoln Island was that of the great woods which covered the Serpentine Peninsula, where the wild beasts took refuge, from which Gideon Spilett fully intended to rid his estate.

Before the cold season returned, the most assiduous care was also given to cultivating the wild plants that had been transplanted from the forest to the Grande-vue plateau. Harbert rarely returned from an excursion without bringing back some useful plants. One day, it was specimens of the chicory family, whose seeds alone could yield an excellent oil when pressed; another day, it was common sorrel, whose anti-scorbutic properties were not to be overlooked; and then, some of those precious tubers that have been cultivated since time immemorial in South America—potatoes, of which there are now more than two hundred varieties. The vegetable garden, now well-maintained, well-watered, and well-protected against birds, was divided into small plots, where lettuce, purple potatoes, sorrel, turnips, horseradish, and other cruciferous vegetables grew. The land on this plateau was prodigiously fertile, and one could hope that the harvests would be abundant.

There was no shortage of varied drinks either, and, provided they did not demand wine, even the pickiest eaters had no reason to complain. To the Oswego tea provided by the monardas didymes, and to the

fermented liquor extracted from the roots of the dragon tree, Cyrus Smith had added a real beer; he made it with the young shoots of the "Abies nigra", which, after boiling and fermenting, gave this pleasant and particularly hygienic drink that the Anglo-Americans call "spring-berr", that is to say, fir beer.

Towards the end of summer, the farmyard had a fine pair of bustards, which belonged to the "houbara" species, characterized by a sort of mantle of feathers, a dozen shovelers, whose upper mandible was extended on each side by a membranous appendage, and magnificent roosters, black in crest, wattle and epidermis, similar to the roosters of Mozambique, which strutted on the shore of the lake.

Thus, everything succeeded, thanks to the activity of these courageous and intelligent men. Providence did much for them, no doubt; but, faithful to the great precept, they helped themselves first, and then heaven came to their aid.

After those hot summer days, in the evening, when the work was finished and the sea breeze rose, they liked to sit on the edge of the Grande-vue plateau, under a sort of veranda covered with climbing plants, which Nab had built with his own hands. There, they chatted, they taught each other, they made plans, and the sailor's infectious

good humor constantly cheered this little world, in which the most perfect harmony had always reigned.

We also talked about the country, about dear and great America. What was the status of the Civil War?

It obviously couldn't have lasted! Richmond had quickly fallen, no doubt, into the hands of General Grant! The capture of the Confederate capital must have been the final act of this disastrous struggle! Now, the North had triumphed for the right cause. Ah! How welcome a newspaper would have been for the exiles of Lincoln Island! For eleven months, all communication between them and the rest of humanity had been cut off, and before long, on March 24th, would come the anniversary of the day the balloon cast them upon that unknown shore! They were then nothing but castaways, not even knowing if they could wrest their miserable lives from the elements! And now, thanks to the knowledge of their leader, thanks to their own intelligence, they were true colonists, equipped with weapons, tools, and instruments, who had learned to transform the animals, plants, and minerals of the island—that is to say, the three kingdoms of nature—to their own advantage!

Yes! They often talked about all these things and were still making many plans for the future!

As for Cyrus Smith, mostly silent, he listened to his companions more often than he spoke. Sometimes he smiled at some remark from Harbert, at some joke from Pencroff, but always and everywhere he thought about these inexplicable events, this strange enigma whose secret still eluded him!

CHAPTER IX

The weather changed during the first week of March.

There had been a full moon at the beginning of the month, and the heat was still excessive. The air seemed thick with electricity, and a more or less prolonged period of stormy weather was truly to be feared. Indeed, on the 2nd, thunder roared with extreme violence. The wind was blowing from the east, and hail attacked the facade of Granite House directly, crackling like a volley of grapeshot. The door and window shutters had to be tightly closed, otherwise everything inside the rooms would have flooded. Seeing these hailstones fall, some of which were the size of a pigeon's egg, Pencroff had only one thought: his wheat field was in grave danger.

And immediately he ran to his field, where the ears of corn were already beginning to raise their little green heads, and, using a large

cloth, he managed to protect his harvest. He was stoned in his place, but he did not complain.

This foul weather lasted eight days, during which thunder never ceased to rumble in the depths of the sky. Between storms, it could still be heard rumbling low beyond the horizon; then it would resume with renewed fury. The sky was streaked with lightning, and thunder struck several trees on the island, including an enormous pine that stood near the lake, at the edge of the forest. Two or three times, the shore was also struck by the electrical current, which melted and vitrified the sand. Upon discovering these lightning bolts, the engineer was led to believe that it would be possible to fit windows with thick, solid panes of glass that could withstand wind, rain, and hail.

Having no urgent work to do outside, the colonists took advantage of the bad weather to work inside Granite House, whose layout was improving and being completed day by day. The engineer installed a lathe, which allowed him to turn some toiletry and kitchen utensils, and especially buttons, the lack of which was sorely felt. A gun rack had been installed for the weapons, which were maintained with extreme care, and neither the shelves nor the cupboards left anything to be desired. They sawed, planed, filed, and turned, and throughout this

period of bad weather, all that could be heard was the squeaking of tools or the whirring of the lathe, answering the rumble of thunder.

Master Jup had not been forgotten, and he occupied a separate room, near the general store, a sort of cabin with a frame always filled with good bedding, which suited him perfectly.

"With that good Jup, never a complaint," Pencroff often repeated, "never an inappropriate answer! What a servant, Nab, what a servant!"

— My student, replied Nab, and soon my equal!

"Your superior," the sailor retorted, laughing, "because you, Nab, you talk, and he doesn't!"

It goes without saying that Jup was now aware of the duties. He beat the clothes, he turned the spit, he swept the rooms, he served at table, he stacked the wood, and — a detail that delighted Pencroff — he never went to bed without having tucked the worthy sailor into bed.

As for the health of the colony's members, whether bipedal or bimanal, quadrupedal or quadrupedal, it left nothing to be desired. Living in the open air, on this healthy soil, in this temperate zone, working with both mind and hand, they could not believe that disease would ever touch them.

They were all doing wonderfully well, indeed.

Harbert had already grown two inches in the past year. His face was taking shape and becoming more masculine, and he promised to be a man as accomplished in body as in character. Moreover, he took advantage of all the leisure time afforded him by his manual labor to educate himself; he read the few books found in the crate, and, after the practical lessons that arose from the very necessity of his position, he found in the engineer for the sciences, and in the reporter for languages, teachers who were happy to complete his education.

The engineer's fixed idea was to pass on to the young boy everything he knew, to instruct him by example as much as by words, and Harbert greatly benefited from his teacher's lessons.

"If I die," thought Cyrus Smith, "he'll be the one to replace me!"

The storm ended around March 9th, but the sky remained overcast throughout the last month of summer. The atmosphere, violently disturbed by these electrical disturbances, could not recover its former purity, and there was almost invariably rain and fog, except for three or four fine days which favored excursions of all kinds.

Around this time, the female onagga gave birth to a calf of the same sex as its mother, and it thrived. In the corral, under the same circumstances, the herd of mouflon sheep increased, and several lambs

were already bleating under the sheds, to the great joy of Nab and Harbert, who each had their favorite among the newborns.

An attempt was also made to domesticate the peccaries, and this attempt was entirely successful. A stable was built near the poultry yard and soon housed several young ones being civilized, that is to say, fattened up under Nab's care.

Master Jup, responsible for bringing them their daily food, dishwater, kitchen scraps, and so on, conscientiously carried out his duties. He did occasionally amuse himself at the expense of his little charges and pull their tails, but it was mischief, not malice, for those little twisted tails amused him like a toy, and his instinct was that of a child. One day that March, Pencroff, while chatting with the engineer, reminded Cyrus Smith of a promise he hadn't yet had time to fulfill.

"You mentioned a device that would eliminate the long ladders at Granite-House, Mr. Cyrus," he said. "Won't you build it someday?"

"You mean some kind of elevator!" replied Cyrus Smith.

"Let's call it an elevator, if you like," replied the sailor. "The name doesn't matter, as long as it takes us home without any effort."

— Nothing will be easier, Pencroff, but is it really necessary?

"Indeed, Mr. Cyrus. Now that we've provided for the essentials, let's think a little about comfort. For people, it will be a luxury, if you like; but for things, it's indispensable! It's not so easy to climb a long ladder when you're heavily laden!"

"Well, Pencroff, we will try to satisfy you," replied Cyrus Smith.

— But you don't have a machine at your disposal.

— We will do it.

— A steam engine?

"No, a water machine."

And, indeed, to maneuver his device, a natural force was there at the engineer's disposal, and which he could use without great difficulty.

To achieve this, it was simply a matter of increasing the flow of the small diversion made from the lake that supplied water to Granite House. The opening between the stones and grass at the upper end of the spillway was therefore enlarged, creating a steep drop at the bottom of the corridor, the overflow of which spilled out through the inner well. Below this drop, the engineer installed a paddle cylinder connected externally to a wheel wound with a strong cable supporting a canopy. In this way, by means of a long rope that dropped to the

ground and allowed the hydraulic motor to be engaged or disengaged, one could ascend in the canopy to the door of Granite House.

It was on March 17th that the elevator was first operated, and to everyone's satisfaction.

From now on, all burdens, wood, coal, provisions, and the colonists themselves were hoisted by this simple system, which replaced the primitive ladder, and which no one thought to miss. Top was particularly delighted with this improvement, for he did not have and could not have Master Jup's skill for climbing ladders, and many times it was on Nab's back, or even on the orang's, that he had had to make the ascent of Granite-House.

Around this time, Cyrus Smith also tried to manufacture glass, and he first had to adapt the old pottery kiln for this new purpose.

This presented some rather great difficulties; but after several unsuccessful attempts, he finally succeeded in setting up a glassmaking workshop, which Gideon Spilett and Harbert, the engineer's natural helpers, did not leave for several days.

As for the substances that go into the composition of glass, they are solely sand, chalk, and soda (carbonate or sulfate). The shoreline provided the sand, lime provided the chalk, marine plants provided the soda, pyrite provided the sulfuric acid, and the soil provided the coal to

heat the furnace to the required temperature. Cyrus Smith was therefore in the necessary conditions to operate.

The most difficult tool to make was the glassmaker's "pipe," an iron tube five to six feet long, used to collect the molten material at one end. But by means of a long, thin strip of iron, rolled like a gun barrel, Pencroff succeeded in making this pipe, and it was soon ready for use.

On March 28th, the furnace was heated vigorously. One hundred parts sand, thirty-five parts chalk, forty parts sodium sulfate, mixed with two or three parts powdered charcoal, made up the substance, which was placed in the refractory clay crucibles. When the high temperature of the furnace had reduced it to a liquid, or rather a pasty, state, Cyrus Smith "scooped" a certain quantity of this paste with the blowpipe; he turned it over and over on a metal plate previously prepared, so as to give it the proper shape for blowing; then he passed the blowpipe to Harbert, telling him to blow from the other end.

"Like making soap bubbles?" asked the young boy.

"Exactly," replied the engineer.

And Harbert, puffing out his cheeks, blew so hard and so well into the cane, taking care to turn it constantly, that his breath expanded the vitreous mass.

Further quantities of molten substance were added to the first, and the result was soon a bubble that measured a foot in diameter. Then Cyrus Smith took the cane from Harbert's hands, and, giving it a pendulum-like motion, he finally elongated the malleable bubble, so as to give it a cylindro-conical shape.

The blowing operation had thus produced a glass cylinder ending in two hemispherical caps, which were easily detached by means of a sharp iron moistened with cold water; then, by the same process, this cylinder was split lengthwise, and, after being made malleable by a second heating, it was spread out on a plate and flattened by means of a wooden roller.

The first pane of glass was thus made, and it was enough to repeat the operation fifty times to obtain fifty panes. So the windows of Granite-House were soon fitted with diaphanous panes, perhaps not very white, but sufficiently transparent.

As for the glassware, glasses and bottles, it was just a game. They were accepted, moreover, as they came to the end of the blowpipe. Pencroff had asked the favor of "blowing" in his turn, and it was a pleasure for him, but he blew so hard that his creations took on the most delightful shapes, which earned his admiration.

During one of the excursions that were made at that time, a new tree was discovered, whose products further increased the food resources of the colony.

Cyrus Smith and Harbert, while hunting, had ventured one day into the Far West forest, to the left of the Mercy, and, as always, the young boy bombarded the engineer with questions, which the latter answered wholeheartedly. But hunting is like any other pursuit, and without the necessary zeal, there are many reasons for failure.

Now, since Cyrus Smith wasn't a hunter, and Harbert, on the other hand, spoke of chemistry and physics, many kangaroos, capybaras, and agoutis passed within easy range that day, yet they all escaped the young boy's rifle. It followed, therefore, that, as the day was already advanced, the two hunters were likely to have made a pointless excursion, when Harbert, stopping and letting out a cry of joy, exclaimed:

"Ah! Mr. Cyrus, do you see that tree?"

And he was showing a shrub rather than a tree, for it consisted of only a simple stem, covered with scaly bark, which bore leaves striped with small parallel veins.

"And what is that tree that looks like a small palm tree?" asked Cyrus Smith.

— It's a "cycas revoluta", I have a picture of it in our natural history dictionary!

— But I don't see any fruit on this shrub?

"No, Mr. Cyrus," replied Harbert, "but its trunk contains a flour that nature provides us already ground."

— So this is the breadfruit tree?

— Yes! The breadfruit tree.

“Well, my child,” replied the engineer, “that’s a valuable discovery, while we wait for our wheat harvest. Get to work, and may heaven grant that you haven’t made a mistake!”

Harbert was right. He broke off the stem of a cycad, which was composed of glandular tissue and contained a certain amount of starchy pith, traversed by woody bundles separated by concentrically arranged rings of the same substance. Mixed with this starch was a mucilaginous sap with an unpleasant taste, but which could easily be expelled by pressure. This cellular substance formed a truly superior quality flour, extremely nutritious, the export of which was once prohibited by Japanese law.

Cyrus Smith and Harbert, after thoroughly studying the portion of the Far West where these cycads grew, took landmarks and returned to

Granite-House, where they made their discovery known.

The next day, the colonists went to harvest, and Pencroff, increasingly enthusiastic about his island, said to the engineer:

"Mr. Cyrus, do you believe there are islands for shipwrecked people?"

— What do you mean by that, Pencroff?

— Well, I mean islands created specifically for proper shipwrecks, and where poor devils can always get out of trouble!

"That's possible," the engineer replied with a smile.

“That is certain, sir,” replied Pencroff, “and it is no less certain that Lincoln Island is one!”

They returned to Granite House with a bountiful harvest of cycad stems. The engineer set up a press to extract the mucilaginous sap mixed with the starch, and he obtained a considerable quantity of flour which, under Nab's hand, was transformed into cakes and puddings. It wasn't quite true wheat bread yet, but it was close.

At that time, the onagga, the goats and the sheep in the corral provided the colony with the necessary milk daily. So the cart, or rather a kind of light wagon that had replaced it, made frequent trips to the corral, and when it was Pencroff's turn to make his rounds, he took Jup

with him and had him drive, which Jup, cracking his whip, carried out with his usual intelligence.

Everything prospered, both at the corral and at Granite House, and truly the colonists, except for being far from their homeland, had no cause for complaint. They were so well suited to this life, moreover, so accustomed to this island, that they would not have left its hospitable soil without regret!

And yet, so strong is the love of country in the heart of man, if any ship had unexpectedly appeared in sight of the island, the colonists would have signaled to it, they would have attracted it, and they would have left!... Meanwhile, they lived this happy existence, and they feared rather than desired that any event would interrupt it.

But who could boast of ever having fixed their fortune and being safe from its reversals!

In any case, this Lincoln Island, which the settlers had already been inhabiting for more than a year, was often the subject of their conversation, and one day an observation was made which was later to lead to serious consequences.

April 1st , a Sunday, Easter Sunday, which Cyrus Smith and his companions had sanctified with rest and prayer. The day had been beautiful, such as an October day might be in the northern hemisphere.

Towards evening, after dinner, they all gathered under the veranda, at the edge of the Grande-vue plateau, watching night rise over the horizon. Nab had served a few cups of that elderberry seed infusion, which served as a substitute for coffee. They were talking about the island and its isolated location in the Pacific when Gideon Spilett was prompted to say:

"My dear Cyrus, since you have possessed this sextant found in the crate, have you again recorded the position of our island?"

"No," replied the engineer.

— But it might be appropriate to do so, with this instrument which is more perfect than the one you used.

"What's the point?" said Pencroff. "The island is fine where it is!"

"No doubt," continued Gideon Spilett, "but it may have happened that the imperfection of the instruments affected the accuracy of the observations, and since it is easy to verify their accuracy..."

"You are right, my dear Spilett," replied the engineer, "and I should have made this check earlier, although, if I have made any mistake, it should not exceed five degrees in longitude or latitude."

"Hey! Who knows?" the reporter continued, "who knows if we are not much closer to inhabited land than we think?"

"We will know tomorrow," replied Cyrus Smith, "and if it were not for so many occupations which have left me no leisure, we would already know."

"Well!" said Pencroff, "Mr. Cyrus is too good an observer to have made a mistake, and if it hasn't moved, the island is fine where he put it!"

"We'll see."

It followed, therefore, that the next day, using the sextant, the engineer made the necessary observations to verify the coordinates he had already obtained, and this was the result of his operation: his first observation had given him for the situation of Lincoln Island: in west longitude: from 150 degrees to 155 degrees; in south latitude: from 30 degrees to 35 degrees.

The second gave exactly: in west longitude: 150 degrees 30 minutes; in south latitude: 34 degrees 57 minutes.

Thus, despite the imperfection of his equipment, Cyrus Smith had operated with such skill that his error had not exceeded five degrees.

"Now," said Gideon Spilett, "since, along with a sextant, we possess an atlas, let us see, my dear Cyrus, the exact position that Lincoln Island occupies in the Pacific."

Harbert went to get the atlas, which, as we know, had been published in France, and whose nomenclature was therefore in French.

The map of the Pacific was developed, and the engineer, compass in hand, prepared to determine its location.

Suddenly, the compass stopped in his hand, and he said:

"But there is already an island in this part of the Pacific!"

"An island?" exclaimed Pencroff.

"Ours, no doubt?" replied Gideon Spilett.

"No," Cyrus Smith replied. "This island is located at 153 degrees longitude and 37 degrees 11 minutes latitude, that is, two and a half degrees further west and two degrees further south than Lincoln Island."

"And what is this island?" asked Harbert.

— Tabor Island.

— An important island?

— No, a lost islet in the Pacific, and which has perhaps never been visited!

"Well, we will visit it," said Pencroff.

- We?

— Yes, Mr. Cyrus. We will build a decked boat, and I will take charge of piloting it. — How far are we from Tabor Island?

"About one hundred and fifty miles to the northeast," replied Cyrus Smith.

"One hundred and fifty miles! And what's that?" replied Pencroff. "In forty-eight hours and with a good wind, it will be over!"

"But what's the point?" asked the reporter.

"We don't know. We'll have to see!"

And based on this response, it was decided that a boat would be built, so that it could put to sea around next October, with the return of the good season.

CHAPTER X

When Pencroff had set his mind on a project, he did not rest until it had been executed. Now, he wanted to visit the island of Tabor, and, as a boat of a certain size was necessary for this crossing, it was necessary to build said boat.

Here is the plan that was agreed upon by the engineer, in agreement with the sailor.

The boat would measure thirty-five feet at the keel and nine feet at the beam—making it a fast boat, if its bottom and waterline were well-designed—and should not draw more than six feet, with sufficient draft to keep it from drifting. It would be decked along its entire length, pierced by two hatches giving access to two cabins separated by a bulkhead, and rigged as a sloop, with a brigantine, staysail, topsail, jib, and a very manageable sail plan, performing well in squalls and ideal for close-hauled sailing. Finally, its hull would be built with planks flush, meaning the planks would be flush instead of overlapping, and its frames would be hot-swept after the planks, which would be mounted on false frames, were fitted. What wood would be used to build this boat? Elm or fir, which were plentiful on the island? We decided on fir, a wood that is a bit "split", according to the carpenters' expression, but easy to work with, and which withstands immersion in water as well as elm.

With these details settled, it was agreed that, since the return of spring would not occur for another six months, Cyrus Smith and Pencroff would work on the boat alone. Gideon Spilett and Harbert were to continue hunting, and neither Nab nor Master Jup, his assistant, would abandon their assigned household chores. As soon as the trees were chosen, they were felled, cut into pieces, and sawn into planks,

just as pit sawyers might have done. Eight days later, in the recess between the Chimneys and the wall, a work site was prepared, and a keel, thirty-five feet long, fitted with a sternpost and a stempost, lay stretched out on the sand.

Cyrus Smith hadn't embarked on this new project blindly. He was knowledgeable about shipbuilding, as he was about almost everything else, and it was on paper that he had first sought out the dimensions of his vessel. Moreover, he was well served by Pencroff, who, having worked for several years in a Brooklyn shipyard, knew the trade inside and out. It was only after rigorous calculations and careful consideration that the false frames were fitted onto the keel.

Pencroff, one can easily believe, was brimming with enthusiasm to bring his new undertaking to fruition, and he wouldn't have wanted to abandon it for a moment. Only one operation had the privilege of tearing him away, but only for a day, from his construction site. It was the second wheat harvest, which took place on April 15th. It had been as successful as the first, and yielded the proportion of grain predicted beforehand.

"Five bushels! Mr. Cyrus," said Pencroff, after having scrupulously measured his riches.

"Five bushels," replied the engineer, "and at one hundred and thirty thousand grains per bushel, that makes six hundred and fifty thousand grains."

"Well then! We'll sow everything this time," said the sailor, "except for a small reserve, however!"

— Yes, Pencroff, and, if the next harvest gives a proportional yield, we will have four thousand bushels.

— And we'll eat bread?

— We will eat bread.

— But we'll need to build a mill?

"We'll build a mill."

The third wheat field was therefore incomparably larger than the first two, and the land, prepared with extreme care, received the precious seed. This done, Pencroff returned to his work.

Meanwhile, Gideon Spilett and Harbert were hunting in the area, venturing quite deep into the still uncharted parts of the Far West, their rifles loaded, ready for any unpleasant encounter. It was an impenetrable tangle of magnificent trees, pressed tightly together as if space were at a premium. Exploring these wooded masses was extremely difficult, and the reporter never ventured out without his

pocket compass, for the sun barely pierced the thick canopy, and it would have been hard to find his way. Naturally, game was scarcer in these places, where it would not have had sufficient freedom of movement. However, three large herbivores were killed during the last two weeks of April. These were koulas, a sample of which the colonists had already seen north of the lake, who foolishly allowed themselves to be killed among the large branches of the trees where they had sought refuge. Their hides were brought back to Granite House, and, with the help of sulfuric acid, they underwent a kind of tanning process that rendered them usable. A discovery, valuable from another point of view, was also made during one of these excursions, and this one was thanks to Gideon Spilett.

It was April 30th. The two hunters had ventured deep into the southwest of the Far West, when the reporter, about fifty paces ahead of Harbert, arrived in a sort of clearing, where the trees, more spaced out, allowed some rays of sunlight to penetrate.

Gideon Spilett was initially surprised by the odor emanating from certain plants with straight, cylindrical, branching stems, which produced flowers arranged in clusters and very small seeds. The reporter uprooted one or two of these stems and returned to the young boy, to whom he said:

"So, look what this is, Harbert?"

— And where did you find this plant, Mr. Spilett?

— There, in a clearing, where it grows very abundantly.

— Well, Mr. Spilett, said Harbert, this is a discovery that assures you every right to Pencroff's recognition!

— So it's tobacco?

— Yes, and even if it's not top quality, it's still tobacco!

— Ah! Good old Pencroff! He'll be pleased! But he won't smoke it all, by Jove! And he'll surely leave us our share!

"Ah! An idea, Mr. Spilett," replied Harbert. "Let's not say anything to Pencroff, let's take the time to prepare these leaves, and one fine day, we'll present him with a fully packed pipe!"

"Understood, Harbert, and on that day our worthy companion will have nothing more to desire in this world!"

The reporter and the young boy made a good supply of the precious plant, and they returned to Granite-House, where they brought it in "smuggled", and with as much care as if Pencroff had been the strictest of customs officers.

Cyrus Smith and Nab were let in on the secret, and the sailor suspected nothing during the rather long time it took to dry the thin

leaves, chop them, and roast them on hot stones. This took two months; but all these operations could be carried out without Pencroff's knowledge, because, busy with the construction of the ship, he only returned to Granite House during his rest period.

Once again, however, and despite his best efforts, his favorite pastime was interrupted on May 1st by a fishing adventure in which all the colonists had to participate. For several days, an enormous animal had been observed swimming in the waters off Lincoln Island, two or three miles offshore. It was a whale of the largest size, which, presumably, belonged to the southern species known as the "Cape whale."

"What a stroke of luck it would be to capture it!" cried the sailor. "Ah! If we had a suitable boat and a harpoon in good condition, how I would say: 'Let's run to the beast, for it is worth capturing!'"

"Hey! Pencroff," said Gideon Spilett, "I would have liked to see you handle the harpoon. It must be interesting!"

"Very curious and not without danger," said the engineer; "but, since we do not have the means to attack this animal, it is useless to concern ourselves with it."

"I am surprised," said the reporter, "to see a whale at this relatively high latitude."

"Why is that, Mr. Spilett?" replied Harbert. "We are precisely in that part of the Pacific which English and American fishermen call the 'whale-field', and it is here, between New Zealand and South America, that the whales of the southern hemisphere are found in the greatest numbers."

“Nothing could be truer,” replied Pencroff, “and what surprises me is that we didn’t see more. After all, since we can’t get close to them, what does it matter!”

And Pencroff returned to his work, not without a sigh of regret, for in every sailor there is a fisherman, and if the pleasure of fishing is directly proportional to the size of the animal, one can judge what a whaler feels in the presence of a whale!

And if it had only been for pleasure! But one could not deny that such prey would have been very profitable to the colony, for the oil, the fat, the baleen could be used for many purposes!

But then this happened: the reported whale seemed unwilling to leave the waters of the island.

So, either from the windows of Granite House or from the plateau at Grande-vue, Harbert and Gideon Spilett, when they weren't hunting, and Nab, while keeping an eye on his stoves, never took their eyes off the telescope and observed every movement of the animal. The

cetacean, deep in the vast Union Bay, was rapidly traversing it from Cape Mandible to Cape Claw, propelled by its prodigiously powerful tail fin, on which it braced itself and moved in jerky movements at speeds that sometimes reached twelve miles per hour. Sometimes, too, it approached so close to the islet that it could be seen completely.

It was indeed the southern right whale, which is entirely black, and whose head is more depressed than that of northern whales.

It was also seen expelling from its vents, and at a great height, a cloud of vapor... or water, because — however strange the fact may seem — naturalists and whalers do not yet agree on this subject.

Is it air, is it water that is being expelled? It is generally accepted that it is vapor, which, condensing suddenly on contact with the cold air, falls back as rain.

However, the presence of this marine mammal worried the colonists. It particularly annoyed Pencroff and provided him with distractions during his work.

He ended up wanting that whale, like a child wanting an object that is forbidden to him. At night, he dreamed about it aloud, and certainly, if he had had the means to attack it, if the longboat had been seaworthy, he would not have hesitated to give chase.

But what the colonists could not do, chance did for them, and on May 3, cries from Nab, posted at his kitchen window, announced that the whale had beached itself on the island's shore.

Harbert and Gideon Spilett, who were about to leave for the hunt, abandoned their rifle, Pencroff threw down his axe, Cyrus Smith and Nab joined their companions, and all headed quickly towards the place of the beaching.

This stranding had occurred on the shore at the tip of the wreck, three miles from Granite House, at high tide. It was therefore likely that the cetacean would not be able to free itself easily. In any case, they had to hurry, in order to cut off its escape if necessary. They ran with picks and iron-tipped spears, crossed the Mercy Bridge, went back down the right bank of the river, took the shoreline, and, in less than twenty minutes, the settlers were beside the enormous animal, above which a world of birds was already swarming.

"What a monster!" cried Nab.

And the expression was apt, for it was a southern right whale, eighty feet long, a giant of its kind, which must have weighed no less than one hundred and fifty thousand pounds!

However, the monster, thus stranded, did not move and did not try, by struggling, to refloat itself while the sea was still high.

The colonists soon had an explanation for its immobility when, at low tide, they had circled the animal.

He was dead, and a harpoon was protruding from his left side.

"So there are whalers in our area?" said Gideon Spilett immediately.

"Why is that?" asked the sailor.

— Since this harpoon is still here...

"Hey! Mr. Spilett, that proves nothing," replied Pencroff. "Whales have been seen to travel thousands of miles with a harpoon in their flank, and this one would have been struck in the North Atlantic and come to die in the South Pacific, and that shouldn't surprise us!"

— However… said Gideon Spilett, who was not satisfied with Pencroff's statement.

"That is perfectly possible," replied Cyrus Smith; "but let us examine this harpoon. Perhaps, following a fairly widespread custom, the whalers engraved the name of their ship on it?"

Indeed, Pencroff, having torn off the harpoon that the animal had in its flank, read this inscription on it: Maria-Stella Vineyard.

"A Vineyard ship! A ship from my country!" he cried. "The Maria-Stella! A fine whaling ship, indeed! And one I know well! Ah! My friends, a Vineyard vessel, a Vineyard whaling ship!"

And the sailor, brandishing the harpoon, repeated, not without emotion, that name which was dear to his heart, that name of his native land!

But, since they couldn't wait for the Maria-Stella to claim the harpooned animal, they decided to butcher it before decomposition began. The birds of prey, which had been eyeing this rich catch for several days, wanted to claim it immediately, and they had to be driven away with gunfire.

This whale was a female whose mammary glands provided a large quantity of milk which, according to the opinion of the naturalist Dieffenbach, could pass for cow's milk, and, indeed, it differs from it neither in taste, nor in colour, nor in density.

Pencroff had once served on a whaling ship, and he was able to methodically direct the butchering operation — a rather unpleasant operation, which lasted three days, but which none of the colonists were deterred from, not even Gideon Spilett, who, according to the sailor, would end up making "a very good castaway."

The lard, cut into parallel slices two and a half feet thick, then divided into pieces that could weigh a thousand pounds each, was melted in large earthenware vessels brought to the very spot where it was butchered—for they did not want to pollute the area around the

Grande-vue plateau—and in this process it lost about a third of its weight. But there was plenty of it: the tongue alone yielded six thousand pounds of oil, and the lower lip four thousand. Then, along with this fat, which would ensure a long supply of stearin and glycerin, there were also the baleen plates, which would undoubtedly find their use, although neither umbrellas nor corsets were worn at Granite-House. The upper part of the cetacean's mouth was, in fact, furnished on both sides with eight hundred horny plates, very elastic, of fibrous texture, and tapered at their edges like two large combs, whose teeth, six feet long, serve to retain the thousands of animalcules, small fish and mollusks on which the whale feeds.

The operation completed, to the great satisfaction of the operators, the remains of the animal were left to the birds, who should make every last vestige disappear, and daily work resumed at Granite-House.

However, before returning to the construction site, Cyrus Smith had the idea of making some devices that greatly aroused the curiosity of his companions. He took a dozen whalebones, cut them into six equal parts, and sharpened their ends.

"And this, Mr. Cyrus," asked Harbert, "when the operation is over, will this be of any use?"

"To kill wolves, foxes, and even jaguars," replied the engineer.

- NOW?

— No, this winter, when we have ice available.

"I don't understand..." replied Harbert.

“You’ll understand, my child,” replied the engineer. “This device isn’t my invention, and it’s frequently used by Aleutian hunters in Russian America. These baleen plates you see, my friends, well! When it freezes, I’ll bend them, I’ll douse them with water until they’re completely coated with a layer of ice that will maintain their curve, and I’ll scatter them on the snow, after first concealing them under a layer of fat. Now, what will happen if a hungry animal swallows one of these baits? The heat from its stomach will melt the ice, and the baleen, relaxing, will pierce it with its sharp edges.”

"That's ingenious!" said Pencroff.

"And who will spare the powder and the bullets?" replied Cyrus Smith.

"That's better than trapdoors!" added Nab.

— Let's wait for winter then!

"Let's wait for winter."

However, the construction of the boat was progressing, and, towards the end of the month, it was half-planked. It was already clear that its

shape would be excellent for seaworthiness.

Pencroff worked with unparalleled ardor, and it took his robust nature to withstand these fatigues; but his companions were secretly preparing a reward for so much trouble, and, on May 31, he was to experience one of the greatest joys of his life.

That day, at the end of dinner, just as he was about to leave the table, Pencroff felt a hand rest on his shoulder.

It was the hand of Gideon Spilett, who said to him:

"Wait a moment, Master Pencroff, we can't just leave like that! And what about the dessert you're forgetting?"

"Thank you, Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor, "I'm going back to work."

— Well, a cup of coffee, my friend?

— No more than that.

"A pipe, then?"

Pencroff had suddenly stood up, and his good, fat face paled, when he saw the reporter presenting him with a pipe that was completely stuffed, and Harbert, a burning ember.

The sailor tried to speak but could not; but, seizing the pipe, he raised it to his lips; then, applying the ember to it, he drew five or six gulps in

quick succession. A bluish, fragrant cloud rose, and from the depths of this cloud, a delirious voice was heard repeating:

"Tobacco! Real tobacco!"

"Yes, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith, "and even excellent tobacco!"

"Oh! Divine providence! Sacred author of all things!" cried the sailor. "So our island lacks nothing now!"

And Pencroff smoked, smoked, smoked!

"And who made this discovery?" he finally asked. "You, no doubt, Harbert?"

— No, Pencroff, it’s Mr. Spilett.

"Mr. Spilett!" cried the sailor, embracing the reporter on his chest, who had never experienced such an embrace.

"Phew! Pencroff," replied Gideon Spilett, catching his breath, which had been momentarily stifled. "Please give some of your gratitude to Harbert, who identified the plant, to Cyrus, who prepared it, and to Nab, who had a great deal of trouble keeping the secret from us!"

"Well, my friends, I'll repay you for this someday!" replied the sailor. "Now it's a matter of life and death!"

CHAPTER XI

However, winter was coming with this month of June, which is the December of the boreal zones, and the main occupation was the making of warm and sturdy clothes.

The mouflons in the corral had been stripped of their wool, and this precious textile material now only needed to be transformed into fabric.

It goes without saying that Cyrus Smith, having at his disposal neither carding machines, nor combing machines, nor smoothers, nor drawing machines, nor twisting machines, nor a mule-jenny, nor a self-acting spinning machine, nor a loom for weaving wool, had to proceed in a simpler way, so as to save on spinning and weaving. Indeed, he simply intended to use the property that wool fibers have, when pressed in all directions, of interlocking and forming, through their simple interlacing, the fabric we call felt. This felt could therefore be obtained by simple fulling, an operation which, while reducing the fabric's suppleness, notably increases its heat-retaining properties. Now, the wool provided by the mouflon sheep was made of very short fibers, and this is a good condition for felting.

The engineer, aided by his companions, including Pencroff—who once again had to abandon his ship!—began the preliminary operations, which aimed to rid the wool of the oily and greasy substance with which it was impregnated, known as suint. This degreasing was carried out in vats filled with water, which were heated to a temperature of seventy degrees, and in which the wool was immersed for twenty-four hours; it was then thoroughly washed using soda baths; then, once the wool had been sufficiently dried by pressure, it was ready to be fulled, that is to say, to produce a solid, coarse fabric,

undoubtedly of no value in an industrial center of Europe or America, but of which extreme importance would be placed on the "markets of Lincoln Island."

It is understood that this type of fabric must have been known from the earliest times, and indeed, the first woolen fabrics were made using this process which Cyrus Smith would later employ.

Where his engineering skills served him well was in the construction of the machine intended for fulling wool, for he skillfully took advantage of the mechanical force, unused until then, possessed by the waterfall of the beach, to power a fulling mill.

Nothing could have been more rudimentary. A shaft, fitted with cams which raised and lowered vertical hammers in turn, troughs intended to receive the wool, into which these hammers fell, a strong timber frame building containing and connecting the whole system: such was the machine in question, and such it had been for centuries, until the moment when the idea was had of replacing the hammers with compressor cylinders and of subjecting the material, no longer to beating, but to true rolling.

The operation, expertly directed by Cyrus Smith, was a complete success. The wool, previously impregnated with a soapy solution designed both to facilitate its sliding, coming together, compression,

and softening, and to prevent damage from beating, emerged from the mill as a thick sheet of felt. The striations and irregularities naturally present in the wool fibers had so firmly adhered and interwoven that they formed a fabric equally suitable for clothing or blankets. It was clearly neither merino, nor muslin, nor Scottish cashmere, nor cloth, nor rep, nor Chinese satin, nor Orléans, nor alpaca, nor broadcloth, nor flannel! It was "Lincoln felt," and Lincoln Island now had one more industry.

The settlers therefore had good clothes and thick blankets, and they were able to face the winter of 1866-67 without fear.

The severe cold really began to be felt around June 20th, and, to his great regret, Pencroff had to suspend the construction of the boat, which, moreover, could not fail to be completed by next spring.

The sailor's fixed idea was to make a reconnaissance voyage to Tabor Island, although Cyrus Smith, driven by curiosity, disapproved of the trip, since there was obviously no help to be found on that deserted and semi-arid rock. A voyage of one hundred and fifty miles in a relatively small boat, in the middle of unknown seas, inevitably caused him some apprehension. What if, once out at sea, the vessel were unable to reach Tabor and could not return to Lincoln Island? What would become of it in the middle of the Pacific, so fertile in disasters?

Cyrus Smith often talked about this project with Pencroff, and he found in the sailor a rather strange stubbornness in undertaking this voyage, a stubbornness of which perhaps the latter was not fully aware.

"For in the end," the engineer said to him one day, "I would point out to you, my friend, that after having spoken so highly of Lincoln Island, after having so often expressed the regret that you would feel if you had to abandon it, you are the first to want to leave it."

"Leaving her for just a few days," replied Pencroff, "for just a few days, Mr. Cyrus! Just enough time to go and come back, to see what this islet is all about!"

— But it can't be worth Lincoln Island!

— I'm sure of it in advance!

— So why venture out?

— To find out what's happening on Tabor Island!

— But nothing happens there! Nothing can happen there!

— Who knows?

— And if you get caught in some storm?

"That's not a concern in the warmer months," replied Pencroff. "But, Mr. Cyrus, since we must plan for everything, I would ask your permission to take only Harbert with me on this trip."

— Pencroff, replied the engineer, putting his hand on the sailor's shoulder, if something were to happen to you and to this child, whom chance has made our son, do you think we would ever get over it?

“Mr. Cyrus,” replied Pencroff with unwavering confidence, “we will not cause you that sorrow. Besides, we will discuss this voyage again when the time is right. Then, I imagine that when you have seen our ship, well rigged and well-equipped, when you have observed how it handles at sea, when we have sailed around our island—for we will do so together —I imagine,” I said, “that you will no longer hesitate to let me go! I won’t hide from you that your ship will be a masterpiece!”

"At least say: our ship, Pencroff!" replied the engineer, momentarily disarmed.

The conversation ended there, only to start again later, without convincing either the sailor or the engineer.

The first snows fell towards the end of June. Previously, the corral had been well supplied and no longer required daily visits, but it was decided that a week would never pass without a visit.

The traps were set again, and the devices made by Cyrus Smith were tested. The curved baleen plates, encased in ice and covered with a thick layer of fat, were placed on the edge of the forest, at the place where the animals commonly passed to get to the lake.

To the engineer's great satisfaction, this invention, adapted from the Aleutian fishermen, was a complete success. A dozen foxes, some wild boars, and even a jaguar were caught in it, and these animals were found dead, their stomachs perforated by the relaxed baleen plates.

Here we find an attempt that should be reported, because it was the first attempt made by the colonists to communicate with their fellow human beings.

Gideon Spilett had already considered several times either throwing a message in a bottle into the sea, hoping the currents might carry it to an inhabited shore, or entrusting it to pigeons. But how could anyone seriously hope that pigeons or bottles could cross the distance that separated the island from any land, a distance of twelve hundred miles?

That would have been pure madness.

But on June 30th, an albatross was captured, not without difficulty, whose leg had been slightly wounded by a shot from Harbert. It was a magnificent bird of the family of those great soaring birds, whose outstretched wings measure ten feet, and which can cross seas as wide as the Pacific.

Harbert would have liked to keep this superb bird, whose wound healed quickly and which he intended to tame, but Gideon Spilett made him understand that this opportunity to try to correspond by this

courier with the Pacific lands could not be neglected, and Harbert had to give in, because if the albatross had come from some inhabited region, it would not fail to return there as soon as it was free.

Perhaps, deep down, Gideon Spilett, in whose newspaper the columnist sometimes reappeared, wasn't displeased to launch, on a whim, an engaging article recounting the adventures of the settlers on Lincoln Island! What a success for the regular reporter of the New York Herald, and for the issue containing the column, if it ever reached the address of its editor, the Honorable John Bennett!

Gideon Spilett therefore wrote a brief notice which was put in a bag of strong gummed canvas, with an urgent request to whoever found it to send it to the offices of the New York Herald.

This small bag was attached to the albatross's neck, and not to its leg, for these birds are accustomed to resting on the surface of the sea; then, freedom was restored to this swift air messenger, and it was not without some emotion that the colonists saw it disappear in the distance into the western mists.

"Where is he going?" asked Pencroff.

"Towards New Zealand," replied Harbert.

"Have a good trip!" cried the sailor, who, for his part, did not expect much from this method of correspondence.

With winter, work had resumed inside Granite-House, repairing clothes, making various items, and among other things, sails for the boat, which were cut from the inexhaustible envelope of the balloon...

During the month of July, the cold was intense, but neither wood nor coal was spared.

Cyrus Smith had installed a second fireplace in the great hall, and that was where the long evenings were spent. Conversation while working, reading when hands were idle, and time passed profitably for everyone.

It was a true delight for the colonists when, from that well-lit, candlelit room, warmed by coal, after a comforting dinner, elderflower coffee steaming in their cups, pipes puffing with fragrant smoke, they heard the storm roaring outside! They would have experienced complete well-being, if well-being could ever exist for those far from their fellow human beings and without any possible communication with them! They always talked about their country, the friends they had left behind, the greatness of the American republic, whose influence could only increase, and Cyrus Smith, who had been very involved in the affairs of the Union, keenly interested his listeners with his stories, insights, and predictions.

One day, Gideon Spilett was led to say to him:

"But finally, my dear Cyrus, all this industrial and commercial movement which you predict will continue to progress, is it not in danger of being stopped altogether sooner or later?

— Stopped! And by what?

— But because of the lack of this coal, which can rightly be called the most precious of minerals!

— Yes, the most precious indeed, replied the engineer, and it seems that nature wanted to acknowledge that it was, by making the diamond, which is nothing but pure crystallized carbon.

"You don't mean to say, Mr. Cyrus," replied Pencroff, "that we will burn diamonds instead of coal in the boiler fireboxes?"

"No, my friend," replied Cyrus Smith.

"However, I insist," continued Gideon Spilett. "You don't deny that one day the coal will be completely consumed?"

— Oh! The coal deposits are still considerable, and the hundred thousand workers who extract one hundred million metric quintals annually from them are far from having exhausted them!

"With the increasing proportion of coal consumption," replied Gideon Spilett, "can we foresee that these one hundred thousand workers will soon be two hundred thousand and that extraction will be doubled?"

— No doubt; but, after the European deposits, which new machines will soon allow to be exploited more thoroughly, the coal mines of America and Australia will continue to supply the consumption of industry for a long time to come.

"How long?" asked the reporter.

— At least two hundred and fifty or three hundred years.

"That's reassuring for us," replied Pencroff, "but worrying for our great-great-cousins!"

"We'll find something else," said Harbert.

"We must hope so," replied Gideon Spilett, "because without coal, there will be no more machines, and without machines, no more railways, no more steamships, no more factories, nothing that the progress of modern life requires!"

"But what will we find?" asked Pencroff. "Can you imagine, Mr. Cyrus?"

— More or less, my friend.

— And what will we burn instead of coal?

"Water," replied Cyrus Smith.

"Water!" cried Pencroff, "water to heat steamships and locomotives, water to heat water!"

“Yes, but water decomposed into its constituent elements,” replied Cyrus Smith, “and decomposed, no doubt, by electricity, which will then have become a powerful and manageable force, for all great discoveries, by some inexplicable law, seem to coincide and complement each other at the same time. Yes, my friends, I believe that water will one day be used as fuel, that the hydrogen and oxygen that constitute it, used separately or together, will provide an inexhaustible source of heat and light of an intensity that coal could never match. One day, the holds of steamers and the tenders of locomotives, instead of coal, will be loaded with these two compressed gases, which will burn in the fireboxes with enormous calorific power. So, there is nothing to fear.” As long as this earth is inhabited, it will provide for the needs of its inhabitants, and they will never lack light or heat, nor will they lack the produce of the plant, mineral, or animal kingdoms. I therefore believe that when the coal deposits are exhausted, we will heat our homes and ourselves with water. Water is the coal of the future.

"I'd like to see that," said the sailor.

"You got up too early, Pencroff," replied Nab, who only intervened with these words in the discussion.

However, it wasn't Nab's words that ended the conversation, but rather Top's barking, which erupted again with that strange intonation

that had already concerned the engineer. At the same time, Top began circling the well opening again, which was located at the end of the inner corridor.

"What does Top have to bark about now?" asked Pencroff.

"And Jup growling like that?" added Harbert.

Indeed, the orang, joining the dog, gave unmistakable signs of agitation, and, a singular detail, these two animals seemed to be more worried than irritated.

"It is obvious," said Gideon Spilett, "that this well is in direct communication with the sea, and that some marine animal comes from time to time to breathe at the bottom.

"That's obvious," replied the sailor, "and there's no other explanation to give... come on, silence, Top," added Pencroff, turning to the dog, "and you, Jup, back to your room!"

The monkey and the dog fell silent. Jup went back to bed, but Top remained in the living room, and he continued to make low growls throughout the evening.

The incident was no longer mentioned, but it darkened the engineer's brow.

For the remainder of July, there were alternating periods of rain and cold. The temperature did not drop as low as during the previous winter, and its high did not exceed eight degrees Fahrenheit (13.33 degrees Celsius below zero). But if this winter was less cold, it was certainly more troubled by storms and gales. There were again violent onslaughts from the sea that more than once damaged the Chimneys. It was as if a tidal wave, caused by some underwater disturbance, lifted these monstrous waves and hurled them against the wall of Granite House.

When the settlers, leaning out of their windows, watched these enormous masses of water breaking before their eyes, they could only admire the magnificent spectacle of this impotent fury of the ocean. The waves rebounded in dazzling foam, the entire shore disappeared beneath this raging flood, and the mountain range seemed to emerge from the sea itself, whose spray rose to a height of over one hundred feet.

During these storms, it was difficult to venture onto the island's roads, even dangerous, as falling trees were frequent.

However, the settlers never let a week go by without visiting the corral. Fortunately, this enclosure, sheltered by the southeastern buttress of Mount Franklin, did not suffer too much from the

hurricane's fury, which spared its trees, sheds, and palisade. But the barnyard, located on the Grande-Vue plateau and, consequently, directly exposed to the easterly winds, sustained considerable damage. The dovecote's roof was torn off twice, and the fence also collapsed. All of this needed to be rebuilt more sturdily, for, as was clearly evident, Lincoln Island was situated in the most treacherous part of the Pacific. It truly seemed as if it formed the focal point of vast cyclones, which lashed it like the whip of a spinning top.

However, in this case, it was the spinning top that was stationary, and the whip that was spinning.

During the first week of August, the gusts gradually subsided, and the atmosphere regained a calm it seemed to have lost forever. With the calm, the temperature dropped, the cold became very intense again, and the temperature column fell to eight degrees Fahrenheit below zero (22 degrees Celsius below ice).

On August 3rd, an excursion, planned for several days, was undertaken in the southeast of the island, towards the shelduck marsh. The hunters were tempted by all the waterfowl that established their winter quarters there. Wild ducks, snipe, pintails, teals, and grebes were plentiful, and it was decided that a day would be devoted to an expedition against these birds.

Not only Gideon Spilett and Harbert, but also Pencroff and Nab took part in the expedition. Only Cyrus Smith, citing some work, did not join them and remained at Granite House.

The hunters then set off for Port Ballon to reach the marsh, having promised to return by evening. Top and Jup accompanied them. As soon as they had passed under the Mercy Bridge, the engineer raised it and returned, intent on carrying out a project for which he wanted to be alone.

Now, this project was to meticulously explore this interior shaft whose opening was at the level of the Granite-House corridor, and which communicated with the sea, since it formerly served as a passage for the waters of the lake.

Why did Top circle that opening so often? Why did he let out such strange barks when some sort of unease drew him back to the well? Why did Jup join Top in a kind of shared anxiety? Did this well have other connections besides the vertical one to the sea? Did it branch off to other parts of the island? This is what Cyrus Smith wanted to know, and, at first, to be the only one to know. He had therefore resolved to attempt to explore the well while his companions were away, and the opportunity had presented itself.

It was easy to descend to the bottom of the shaft using the rope ladder, which had been out of use since the elevator was installed and was long enough. This is what the engineer did. He dragged the ladder to the hole, which was about six feet in diameter, and let it uncoil after securely fastening its upper end. Then, having lit a lantern, taken a revolver, and tucked a cutlass into his belt, he began to descend the first few rungs.

Everywhere the wall was solid; but some projections of the rock rose up at intervals, and, by means of these projections, it would really have been possible for an agile being to rise up to the opening of the well.

This was a remark made by the engineer; but, carefully passing his lantern over these projections, he found no imprint, no break, which could suggest that they had been used for an ancient or recent climb.

Cyrus Smith descended deeper, illuminating every point of the wall. He saw nothing suspicious.

When the engineer reached the top rungs, he felt the surface of the water, which was perfectly still. Neither at his level, nor in any other part of the shaft, did any lateral passage open up that could branch out into the heart of the rock. The wall, which Cyrus Smith struck with the handle of his cutlass, sounded solid. It was compact granite, through which no living creature could find a way. To reach the bottom of the

shaft and then ascend to its opening, one had to pass through this always-submerged channel that connected it to the sea through the rocky subsoil of the shore, and this was possible only for marine animals. As for the question of where this channel ended, at what point on the coastline, and at what depth beneath the waves, it could not be answered.

So, Cyrus Smith, having finished his exploration, went back up, removed the ladder, covered the well opening and returned, deep in thought, to the great hall of Granite-House, saying to himself: "I saw nothing, and yet there is something!"

CHAPTER XII

That same evening, the hunters returned, having had a good hunt, and, literally loaded with game, they carried all that four men could carry.

Top had a string of pintails around his neck, and Jup, belts of snipe around his body.

"There, my master," cried Nab, "there's something to occupy our time with! Preserves, pâtés, we'll have a nice storehouse! But someone must help me. I'm counting on you, Pencroff."

"No, Nab," replied the sailor. "The ship's rigging requires my assistance, and you will surely manage without me."

— And you, Mr. Harbert?

"Me, Nab, I have to go to the corral tomorrow," replied the young boy.

— So it will be you, Mr. Spilett, who will help me?

"To oblige you, Nab," replied the reporter, "but I warn you that if you reveal your recipes to me, I will publish them."

"As you see fit, Mr. Spilett," replied Nab, "as you see fit!"

And so it was that, the next day, Gideon Spilett, now Nab's assistant, was installed in his culinary laboratory. But beforehand, the engineer had informed him of the results of the exploration he had carried out the previous day, and, in this respect, the reporter shared Cyrus Smith's opinion that, although he had found nothing, there was still a secret to be discovered!

The cold persisted for another week, and the colonists did not leave Granite House except to tend to the poultry. The house was filled with the pleasant aromas emanating from the skillful manipulations of Nab and the reporter; but not all the spoils of the marsh hunt were preserved, and since the game, in this intense cold, kept perfectly, wild

ducks and other birds were eaten fresh and declared superior to all other aquatic creatures in the known world.

During that week, Pencroff, aided by Harbert, who skillfully wielded the sailmaker's needle, worked with such diligence that the boat's sails were finished. There was no shortage of hemp rope, thanks to the rigging that had been recovered with the balloon's envelope. The cables, the net ropes—all were made of excellent quality fiber, which the sailor put to good use. The sails were edged with strong bolt ropes, and there was still enough left over to make the halyards, shrouds, sheets, and so on. As for the pulleys, on Pencroff's advice and using the lathe he had installed, Cyrus Smith made the necessary ones. Thus, the rigging was entirely complete well before the boat was finished. Pencroff even hoisted a blue, red, and white flag, the colors of which had been obtained from certain dye plants that grew abundantly on the island. However, to the thirty-seven stars representing the thirty-seven states of the union that shine on the American flag yacht, the sailor had added a thirty-eighth, the star of "the state of Lincoln", because he considered his island as already attached to the great republic.

"And," he said, "she is so in heart, if she is not yet so in fact!" Meanwhile, this flag was displayed in the central window of Granite-House, and the colonists greeted it with three hurrahs.

However, the end of the cold season was approaching, and it seemed that this second winter would pass without serious incident, when, on the night of August 11, the Grande-vue plateau was threatened with complete devastation.

After a busy day, the settlers were sleeping soundly when, around four in the morning, they were suddenly awakened by Top's barking.

This time, the dog wasn't barking near the well's opening, but at the doorstep, and it threw itself at it as if trying to force it open. Jup, for his part, was letting out shrill cries.

"Well, Top!" shouted Nab, who was the first to wake up.

But the dog continued to bark with even more fury.

"What is it?" asked Cyrus Smith.

And all of them, hastily dressed, rushed to the windows of the room, which they opened.

Before their eyes, a layer of snow was developing, appearing barely white in the pitch-black night. The settlers saw nothing, but they heard strange barking sounds erupting from the shadows. It was clear that the beach had been invaded by a number of animals that could not be distinguished.

"What is it?" cried Pencroff.

— Wolves, jaguars or monkeys! replied Nab.

"Damn! But they can win the top spot!" said the reporter.

"And our poultry yard," cried Harbert, "and our plantations?"

"So where did they go?" asked Pencroff.

"They will have crossed the culvert on the shore," replied the engineer, "which one of us will have forgotten to close."

"Indeed," said Spilett, "I remember leaving it open..."

"That's a fine piece of work you've done there, Mr. Spilett!" exclaimed the sailor.

"What's done is done," replied Cyrus Smith. "Let's decide what to do next!"

Such were the questions and answers that were quickly exchanged between Cyrus Smith and his companions. He was certain that the culvert had been crossed, that the riverbank was overrun with animals, and that these animals, whatever they might be, could, by going up the left bank of the Mercy, reach the plateau of Grande-vue. They had to outrun them and fight them, if necessary.

"But what are these beasts?" was asked a second time, as the barking grew louder.

These barks startled Harbert, and he remembered having heard them before during his first visit to the sources of Red Creek.

"They are guilty, they are foxes!" he said.

"Forward!" cried the sailor.

And all of them, arming themselves with axes, rifles and revolvers, rushed into the elevator car and set foot on the shore.

These culpables are dangerous animals when they are in large numbers and when hunger irritates them.

Nevertheless, the settlers did not hesitate to throw themselves into the middle of the band, and their first revolver shots, sending rapid flashes into the darkness, forced the first assailants to retreat.

What mattered most was preventing these raiders from reaching the Grande-vue plateau, because the plantations and the farmyard would have been at their mercy, and immense, perhaps irreparable, damage, especially to the wheat field, would inevitably have occurred.

But since the invasion of the plateau could only be done from the left bank of the Mercy, it was enough to oppose the guilty with an insurmountable barrier on this narrow portion of the bank between the river and the granite wall.

This was understood by all, and, on an order from Cyrus Smith, they went to the designated place, while the troop of guilty men leaped into the shadows.

Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Pencroff, and Nab positioned themselves to form an impenetrable line. Top, with his formidable open jaws, preceded the colonists, followed by Jup, armed with a gnarled club which he brandished like a mace.

The night was extremely dark. It was only by the light of the discharges, each of which must have had an impact, that one could see the attackers, who must have been at least a hundred, and whose eyes shone like embers.

"They must not get through!" cried Pencroff.

"They shall not pass!" replied the engineer.

But if they didn't get through, it wasn't for lack of trying. The rear ranks pushed the front, and it was a ceaseless struggle with revolvers and axes. Many corpses of the guilty must already have littered the ground, but the band didn't seem to diminish, and it looked as if it was constantly being replenished by the culvert on the beach.

Soon, the colonists were forced into hand-to-hand combat, and they sustained a few wounds, fortunately minor. Harbert, with a single shot from his revolver, dispatched Nab, upon whose back a fox had just

pounced like a tiger-cat. Top fought with veritable fury, leaping at the foxes' throats and strangling them cleanly. Jup, armed with his stick, struck like a madman, and it was in vain that anyone tried to make him stay back. Gifted, no doubt, with eyesight that allowed him to pierce the darkness, he was always at the forefront of the fighting and from time to time let out a high-pitched whistle, which in him was the mark of extreme jubilation. At one point, he even advanced so far that, by the flash of a revolver shot, he could be seen surrounded by five or six large foxes, whom he faced with remarkable composure.

However, the struggle was to end in favour of the settlers, but only after they had resisted for two long hours! The first glimmers of dawn, no doubt, determined the retreat of the assailants, who fled towards the north, so as to cross the culvert again, which Nab ran to repair immediately.

When daylight had sufficiently illuminated the battlefield, the colonists were able to count about fifty corpses scattered on the beach.

"And Jup!" cried Pencroff. "Where is Jup?"

Jup had disappeared. His friend Nab called him, and, for the first time, Jup did not answer his friend's call.

Everyone went in search of Jup, trembling at the thought of finding him among the dead. The area was cleared of corpses, which stained

the snow with their blood, and Jup was found amidst a veritable heap of the slain, whose shattered jaws and broken backs bore witness to their having faced the fearsome club of the intrepid beast. Poor Jup still held the broken piece of his staff in his hand; but deprived of his weapon, he had been overwhelmed by their numbers, and deep wounds ravaged his chest.

"He's alive!" cried Nab, who leaned over him.

"And we will save him," replied the sailor, "we will care for him like one of our own!"

It seemed that Jup understood, for he inclined his head on Pencroff's shoulder, as if to thank him.

The sailor was wounded himself, but his injuries, as well as those of his companions, were insignificant, because, thanks to their firearms, they had almost always been able to keep the attackers at bay. Therefore, only the orange-haired man was in serious condition.

Jup, carried by Nab and Pencroff, was brought to the elevator, barely uttering a faint moan. He was gently taken back up to Granite House. There, he was placed on one of the mattresses borrowed from a bunk, and his wounds were washed with the utmost care.

It did not appear that they had reached any essential organ, but Jup had been greatly weakened by the loss of his blood, and the fever set in

at a fairly high degree.

So they put him to bed, after his dressing was applied, they put him on a strict diet, "just like a natural person," said Nab, and made him drink a few cups of refreshing herbal tea, the ingredients of which were supplied by the herbal pharmacy of Granite-House.

Jup fell asleep, a sleep that was at first restless; but little by little his breathing became more regular, and he was left to rest in perfect peace. From time to time, Top, walking, one might say, "on tiptoe," came to visit his friend and seemed to approve of all the care being given to him. One of Jup's hands hung out of the bed, and Top licked it with a contrite air.

This very morning, the burial of the dead took place; they were dragged to the Far West forest and buried deep.

This attack, which could have had such serious consequences, was a lesson for the colonists, and from then on they never went to bed without one of them making sure that all the bridges were raised and that no invasion was possible.

However, after causing serious concern for a few days, Jup reacted vigorously against the illness. His constitution prevailed, the fever gradually subsided, and Gideon Spilett, who had some medical knowledge, soon considered him out of danger. On August 16th, Jup began to eat. Nab prepared delicious little sweet dishes for him, which

the sick man savored with relish, for if he had one endearing flaw, it was being a bit of a glutton, and Nab had never done anything to correct this fault in him.

"What do you want?" he would say to Gideon Spilett, who sometimes reproached him for spoiling him. "Poor Jup has no other pleasure than that of the mouth, and I am only too happy to be able to acknowledge his services in this way!"

Ten days after taking to his bed, on August 21st, Master Jup got up. His wounds had healed, and it was clear he would soon regain his usual suppleness and vigor. Like all convalescents, he was then seized by a ravenous hunger, and the reporter let him eat as he pleased, trusting in that instinct so often lacking in rational beings, an instinct that should protect the orange from all excess. Nab was delighted to see his pupil's appetite return.

"Eat," he told him, "my Jup, and don't go hungry! You shed your blood for us, and it's the least I can do to help you do it again!"

Finally, on August 25th, Nab's voice was heard calling his companions.

"Mr. Cyrus, Mr. Gideon, Mr. Harbert, Pencroff, come! Come!"

The colonists, gathered in the great hall, rose at the call of Nab, who was then in the room reserved for Jup.

"What is it?" asked the reporter.

"See!" replied Nab, bursting into a loud laugh.

And what did we see? Master Jup, smoking calmly and seriously, squatting like a Turk on the door of Granite-House!

"My pipe!" cried Pencroff. "He's taken my pipe! Ah! My good Jup, I'll give it to you as a gift! Smoke, my friend, smoke!"

And Jup gravely exhaled thick puffs of tobacco, which seemed to give him unparalleled pleasure.

Cyrus Smith did not appear otherwise surprised by the incident, and he cited several examples of domesticated monkeys, to whom the use of tobacco had become familiar.

But from that day forward, Master Jup had his own pipe, the sailor's former pipe, which hung in his room near his tobacco supply. He packed it himself, lit it from a burning coal, and seemed to be the happiest of four-legged creatures. It's easy to imagine that this shared taste only strengthened the close bond of friendship between Jup and Pencroff, a bond that already united the worthy monkey and the honest sailor.

"He might be a man," Pencroff sometimes said to Nab. "Would you be surprised if one day he started talking to us?"

"No indeed," replied Nab. "What surprises me is rather that he doesn't speak, for after all, he lacks nothing but speech!"

"It would still amuse me," the sailor continued, "if one day he said to me: 'What if we changed pipes, Pencroff!'"

“Yes,” replied Nab. “What a misfortune that he was born mute!”

With the arrival of September, winter was completely over, and work resumed with renewed vigor.

The construction of the boat progressed rapidly. It was already fully planked, and it was internally framed, so as to connect all parts of the hull, with frames softened by steam, which lent themselves to all the requirements of the template.

Since wood was plentiful, Pencroff suggested to the engineer that the hull be lined internally with a watertight lining, which would completely ensure the solidity of the vessel.

Cyrus Smith, not knowing what the future held, approved the sailor's idea of making his boat as sturdy as possible.

The hull and deck of the boat were completely finished around September 15th. To caulk the seams, oakum was made from dry eelgrass, which was hammered in between the planks of the hull, the

hull, and the deck; then, these seams were covered with boiling tar, which the pines in the forest provided in abundance.

The boat's outfitting was extremely simple.

It had first been ballasted with heavy pieces of granite, set in a bed of lime, and of which approximately twelve thousand pounds were lashed. A deck was laid over this ballast, and the interior was divided into two chambers, along which extended two benches, which served as chests. The foot of the mast was to brace the bulkhead separating the two chambers, which were accessed through two hatches, open to the deck and fitted with hatch covers.

Pencroff had no trouble finding a suitable tree for the mast. He chose a young, straight, knot-free fir, which he simply had to square at its base and round at its top. The fittings for the mast, the rudder, and the hull had been roughly but solidly made at the chimney forge. Finally, yards, topmast, boom, spars, oars, etc., everything was finished in the first week of October, and it was agreed that the boat would be sea-tested near the island to see how it performed and to what extent it could be relied upon.

Throughout this time, the necessary work had not been neglected. The corral was being renovated, as the herd of mouflon and goats included a number of young that needed housing and feeding. The

settlers had made regular visits to the oyster beds, the rabbit warren, the coal and iron deposits, and several hitherto unexplored parts of the Far West forests, which were teeming with game.

Some native plants were also discovered, and, while they had no immediate use, they helped to diversify the plant reserves at Granite House. These were species of ice plant, some similar to those of the Cape, with edible fleshy leaves, others producing seeds that contained a kind of flour.

On October 10th, the boat was launched into the sea. Pencroff was beaming. The operation was a complete success.

The fully rigged boat, having been pushed onto rollers at the edge of the shore, was caught by the rising tide and floated to the applause of the colonists, and particularly of Pencroff, who displayed no modesty on this occasion. Moreover, his vanity was to outlive the completion of the boat, since, having built it, he was to be called upon to command it. The rank of captain was conferred upon him with everyone's approval.

To satisfy Captain Pencroff, it was first necessary to give a name to the vessel, and, after several proposals were discussed at length, the votes were united on that of Bonadventure, which was the baptismal name of the honest sailor.

As soon as the Bonadventure was lifted by the rising tide, it could be seen that it was perfectly in its waterlines, and that it should sail properly under all points of sail.

Moreover, the test was to be carried out that very day, during an excursion off the coast. The weather was fine, the breeze fresh, and the sea calm, especially on the southern coast, as the wind had been blowing from the northwest for an hour already.

"Embark! Embark!" shouted Captain Pencroff.

But lunch was needed before leaving, and it even seemed a good idea to take provisions on board, in case the excursion lasted until evening.

Cyrus Smith was also eager to try out this vessel, the plans for which he himself had drawn up, although, on the sailor's advice, he had often modified some parts of them; but he did not have the confidence in it that Pencroff displayed, and since the latter no longer spoke of the voyage to Tabor Island, Cyrus Smith even hoped that the sailor had given up on it. It would have been repugnant to him, in fact, to see two or three of his companions venture out so far in this boat, so small in the end, and which measured no more than fifteen tons.

At ten-thirty, everyone was on board, even Jup, even Top. Nab and Harbert raised the anchor that was biting into the sand near the mouth

of the Mercy, the brigantine was hoisted, the Lincolnian flag flew at the top of the mast, and the Bonadventure, led by Pencroff, set sail.

To get out of Union Bay, it was first necessary to sail downwind, and it was observed that, under this heading, the speed of the boat was satisfactory.

After rounding the tip of the wreck and Cape Claw, Pencroff had to keep close to the wind to extend the southern coast of the island, and, after sailing a few tacks, he observed that the Bonadventure could sail about five-quarters of the way to the wind and that it held well against leeway. It tacked very well to windward, with good momentum, as sailors say, and even gaining ground during its tack.

The passengers of the Bonadventure were truly delighted. They had a good vessel there, which, if necessary, could be of great service to them, and in this fine weather, with this well-made breeze, the trip was charming.

Pencroff sailed out to sea, three or four miles from the coast, abeam of the port ballon. The island then appeared in all its development and in a new aspect, with the varied panorama of its coastline from the claw cape to the reptile promontory, its first plans of forests in which the conifers still stood out against the young foliage of the other trees

barely budded, and this Mount Franklin, which dominated the whole and whose summit was whitened by a few snows.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Harbert.

"Yes, our island is beautiful and good," replied Pencroff. "I love it as I loved my poor mother! She took us in, poor and lacking everything, and what do these five children who fell from the sky lack?"

"Nothing!" replied Nab. "Nothing, Captain!"

And the two brave men let out three tremendous hurrahs in honor of their island!

Meanwhile, Gideon Spilett, leaning against the foot of the mast, was sketching the panorama unfolding before his eyes.

Cyrus Smith watched in silence.

"Well, Mr. Cyrus," asked Pencroff, "what do you say to our boat?"

"He seems to be behaving well," replied the engineer.

— Good! And do you believe, now, that he could undertake a journey of some duration?

— What trip, Pencroff?

— The one on Tabor Island, for example?

"My friend," replied Cyrus Smith, "I believe that, in a pressing case, one should not hesitate to entrust oneself to the Bonadventure, even for

a longer crossing; but, you know, I would see you leave with difficulty for Tabor Island, since nothing obliges you to go there."

“We like to know our neighbors,” replied Pencroff, stubbornly clinging to his idea. “Tabor Island is our neighbor, and the only one! Politeness dictates that we at least pay it a visit!”

"Good heavens!" said Gideon Spilett, "our friend Pencroff is a stickler for propriety!"

"I'm not fussy about anything," replied the sailor, who was slightly annoyed by the engineer's opposition, but who did not want to cause him any trouble.

"Consider, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith, "that you cannot go to Tabor Island alone."

— One companion will be enough for me.

"Very well," replied the engineer. "So you risk depriving the Lincoln Island colony of two out of five colonists?"

"Out of six!" replied Pencroff. "You're forgetting Jup."

"Out of seven!" added Nab. "One is worth two!"

"There is no risk, Mr. Cyrus," Pencroff replied.

"It's possible, Pencroff; but, I repeat, it's exposing oneself unnecessarily!"

The stubborn sailor didn't reply and dropped the conversation, determined to resume it later. Little did he know that an incident would come to his aid and transform what was merely a whim, debatable after all, into an act of humanity. Indeed, after having stayed offshore, the Bonadventure had just approached the coast, heading towards Port Ballon. It was important to check the channels between the sandbanks and reefs, and to mark them if necessary, since this small cove was to be the ship's home port.

We were now only half a mile from the coast, and we had had to tack to gain ground against the wind. The speed of the Bonadventure was only very moderate then, because the breeze, partly stopped by the high ground, barely filled its sails, and the sea, smooth as ice, rippled only with the breath of the capricious gusts that passed by.

Harbert was standing at the front, to indicate the route to follow through the passes, when he suddenly cried out:

"Lofe, Pencroff, lofe."

"What is it?" replied the sailor, standing up. "A rock?"

"No... wait," said Harbert... "I can't see very well... look again... well... come a little..."

And saying this, Harbert, lying along the edge, quickly plunged his arm into the water and stood up, saying:

"A bottle!"

He was holding a closed bottle in his hand, which he had just grabbed a few cables' lengths from the coast.

Cyrus Smith took the bottle. Without saying a word, he popped off the cork and pulled out a damp piece of paper on which these words were written:

Shipwrecked... Tabor Island: 153 degrees W long. — 37 degrees 11 S lat.

CHAPTER XIII

"A shipwrecked man!" cried Pencroff, "abandoned a few hundred miles from us on that island of Tabor! Ah! Mr. Cyrus, you will no longer oppose my travel plans!"

"No, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith, "and you will leave as soon as possible."

— Starting tomorrow?

"Starting tomorrow."

The engineer held in his hand the paper he had removed from the bottle. He pondered it for a few moments, then, speaking again:

"From this document, my friends," he said, "from the very form in which it is conceived, we must first conclude this: firstly, that the shipwrecked man of Tabor Island is a man with fairly advanced knowledge of nautical matters, since he gives the latitude and longitude of the island, which are consistent with those we have found, and accurate to within one minute; secondly, that he is English or American, since the document is written in English.

“That makes perfect sense,” replied Gideon Spilett, “and the presence of this shipwrecked man explains the arrival of the crate on the island’s shores. There was a shipwreck, since there is a shipwrecked man. As for him, whoever he may be, it’s fortunate for him that Pencroff had the idea of building this boat and testing it today, because one day later, and this bottle could have shattered on the reefs.”

"Indeed," said Harbert, "it's a lucky break that the Bonadventure happened to be passing by, precisely when that bottle was still afloat!"

"And that doesn't seem strange to you?" Cyrus Smith asked Pencroff.

"That seems fortunate to me, that's all," replied the sailor. "Do you see anything extraordinary in that, Mr. Cyrus? That bottle had to go somewhere, and why not here as well as anywhere else?"

"You may be right, Pencroff," replied the engineer, "and yet..."

"But," Harbert observed, "there's no proof that this bottle has been floating on the sea for a long time?"

"Nothing," replied Gideon Spilett, "and the document even appears to have been recently written. What do you think, Cyrus?"

"That's difficult to verify, and besides, we'll find out!" replied Cyrus Smith.

During this conversation, Pencroff hadn't been idle. He had tacked, and the Bonadventure, on a broad reach with all sails set, was speeding towards Cape Griffe. Everyone was thinking about the shipwrecked man from Tabor Island. Was there still time to save him? A momentous event in the lives of the colonists!

They themselves were only shipwrecked, but it was to be feared that another might not have been as favored as they were, and their duty was to run towards misfortune.

Cape Claw was rounded, and the Bonadventure anchored around four o'clock at the mouth of the Mercy.

That very evening, the details of the new expedition were settled. It seemed appropriate that Pencroff and Harbert, who were familiar with boat handling, should undertake the voyage alone. Departing the following day, October 11, they could arrive on the 13th, for, with the prevailing wind, the 150-mile crossing should take no more than 48

hours. One day on the island, three or four days to return, so it was reasonable to expect them to be back on Lincoln Island by the 17th. The weather was fine, the barometer was rising steadily, the wind seemed steady, and all the odds were in favor of these brave men, whom a sense of humanitarian duty would soon lead away from their island.

Thus, it had been agreed that Cyrus Smith, Nab, and Gideon Spilett would remain at Granite House; but a complaint arose, and Gideon Spilett, who did not forget his profession as a reporter for the New York Herald, having declared that he would swim rather than miss such an opportunity, he was allowed to take part in the voyage.

The evening was spent transporting aboard the Bonadventure some bedding, utensils, weapons, ammunition, a compass, provisions for about eight days, and, this loading having been quickly carried out, the colonists returned to Granite-House.

The next day, at five o'clock in the morning, farewells were said, not without some emotion on both sides, and Pencroff, unfurling his sails, headed towards Cape Griffe, which he had to round in order to then take the route directly to the southwest.

The Bonadventure was already a quarter of a mile from the coast when its passengers spotted two men on the heights of Granite-House waving goodbye. They were Cyrus Smith and Nab.

"Our friends!" cried Gideon Spilett. "This is our first separation in fifteen months!"

Pencroff, the reporter and Harbert made a final farewell sign, and Granite-House soon disappeared behind the high rocks of the cape.

During the early hours of the day, the Bonadventure remained constantly in sight of the southern coast of Lincoln Island, which soon appeared only as a green basket, from which Mount Franklin emerged. The heights, diminished by distance, gave it an appearance ill-suited to attracting ships to its shores.

The Reptile's promontory was passed around one o'clock, but ten miles offshore. From that distance, it was no longer possible to distinguish anything of the western coast that extended to the ridges of Mount Franklin, and, three hours later, all that was Lincoln Island had disappeared below the horizon.

The Bonadventure handled perfectly. It rose easily into the waves and made good time. Pencroff had rigged his topsail, and, with everything set, he sailed on a straight course, guided by compass. From time to time, Harbert relieved him at the helm, and the young man's hand was so steady that the sailor couldn't fault him for a single veer off course.

Gideon Spilett chatted with one, then another, and, when necessary, lent a hand with the rigging. Captain Pencroff was absolutely satisfied

with his crew and spoke of nothing less than rewarding them with "a quarter-liter of wine per watch!" In the evening, the crescent moon, which was not to reach its first quarter until the 16th, appeared in the twilight and soon faded. The night was dark but very starry, and another beautiful day promised for the following day.

Pencroff, out of prudence, lowered the topsail, not wanting to risk being caught out by a sudden gust with sail up the masthead. It was perhaps over-cautious for such a calm night, but Pencroff was a prudent sailor, and one could hardly blame him.

The reporter slept part of the night. Pencroff and Harbert took turns at the helm every two hours. The sailor trusted Harbert as much as himself, and his confidence was justified by the young man's composure and sound judgment. Pencroff gave him the course like a captain to his helmsman, and Harbert never let the *Bonadventure* deviate from its course.

The night passed well, and the day of October 12th unfolded in the same conditions. The southwest course was strictly maintained throughout the day, and if the *Bonadventure* did not encounter some unknown current, it should have made landfall right on Tabor Island.

As for the sea the boat was now traversing, it was completely deserted. Occasionally, some large bird, an albatross or a frigatebird,

would pass within rifle range, and Gideon Spilett wondered if it wasn't to one of these powerful birds that he had entrusted his last column, addressed to the *New York Herald* . These birds were the only creatures that seemed to frequent that part of the ocean between Tabor Island and Lincoln Island.

"And yet," observed Harbert, "we are in the season when whalers usually head towards the southern part of the Pacific. Truly, I do not believe there is a more deserted sea than this one!"

"It's not as deserted as all that!" replied Pencroff.

"How do you understand it?" asked the reporter.

"But since we're on the subject! Do you mistake our ship for a wreck and our people for porpoises?"

And Pencroff laughed at his own joke. By evening, according to dead reckoning, the Bonadventure had covered a distance of 120 miles since leaving Lincoln Island, that is, 36 hours earlier, which gave a speed of 3 and a third miles per hour. The breeze was light and tending to die down. However, it was hoped that the next day, at daybreak, if the dead reckoning was correct and the course had been right, they would sight Tabor Island. Therefore, neither Gideon Spilett, nor Harbert, nor Pencroff slept during the night of October 12th to 13th. Awaiting the next day, they couldn't help but feel intense emotion. There were so

many uncertainties in the undertaking they had attempted! Were they near Tabor Island? Was the island still inhabited by the shipwrecked man they were coming to rescue? Who was this man? Wouldn't his presence cause some disturbance in the small colony, which had been so united until then?

Would he, moreover, agree to exchange his prison for another? All these questions, which would probably be resolved the next day, kept them awake, and, at the first hints of day, they successively fixed their gaze on all points of the western horizon.

"Land!" cried Pencroff around six o'clock in the morning.

And since it was inconceivable that Pencroff had been mistaken, it was obvious that land was there. Imagine the joy of the small crew of the Bonadventure! Within a few hours, they would be on the island's shore!

Tabor Island, a sort of low-lying coast barely emerging from the waves, was no more than fifteen miles away. Cape Bonadventure, which was a little to the south of the island, was placed directly on it, and, as the sun rose in the east, a few peaks stood out here and there.

"It is only a much smaller islet than Lincoln Island," Harbert observed, "and probably due, like Lincoln Island, to some underwater uplift."

At eleven o'clock in the morning, the Bonadventure was only two miles away, and Pencroff, looking for a passage to land, was now proceeding with extreme caution on these unknown waters.

We could then take in the whole islet, on which stood out clumps of verdant gum trees and a few other large trees, of the kind that grew on Lincoln Island. But, quite astonishingly, not a wisp of smoke rose to indicate that the islet was inhabited, not a signal appeared anywhere along the coastline!

And yet the document was clear: there was a shipwrecked person, and that shipwrecked person should have been on the lookout!

However, the Bonadventure ventured into some rather capricious channels left between the reefs, and Pencroff observed their every twist and turn with the utmost attention. He had put Harbert at the helm, and, stationed at the bow, he scanned the waters, ready to lower the sail, the halyard of which he held in his hand. Gideon Spilett, spyglass in hand, scanned the entire shore without seeing anything. Finally, at about noon, the Bonadventure struck a sandy beach with its bow. The anchor was dropped, the sails lowered, and the crew of the small boat went ashore.

And there was no doubt that it was indeed Tabor Island, since, according to the most recent maps, there was no other island in this

part of the Pacific, between New Zealand and the American coast.

The boat was securely moored so that the ebb of the sea could not carry it away; then, Pencroff and his two companions, after arming themselves well, went up the shore, in order to reach a kind of cone, two hundred and fifty to three hundred feet high, which rose half a mile.

"From the top of this hill," said Gideon Spilett, "we will probably be able to get a basic understanding of the islet, which will facilitate our research."

"It is doing here," replied Harbert, "what Mr. Cyrus first did on Lincoln Island, by climbing Mount Franklin."

"Exactly," replied the reporter, "and it's the best way to do it!"

While chatting, the explorers advanced along the edge of a meadow that ended at the very foot of the cone. Flocks of rock pigeons and terns, similar to those on Lincoln Island, took flight before them. Beneath the woods that bordered the meadow on the left, they heard rustling brush and glimpsed the stirring of grass, indicating the presence of very skittish animals; but nothing so far suggested that the islet was inhabited.

Having reached the foot of the cone, Pencroff, Harbert and Gideon Spilett climbed it in a few moments, and their gazes swept across the

various points of the horizon.

They were indeed on a tiny islet, no more than six miles in circumference, whose perimeter, with few headlands or promontories and few coves or inlets, was shaped like an elongated oval. All around, the sea, completely deserted, stretched to the very edge of the sky. There wasn't a single piece of land, not a single sail in sight!

This islet, wooded across its entire surface, did not offer the diverse landscape of Lincoln Island, arid and wild on one side, but fertile and rich on the other. Here, it was a uniform mass of greenery, dominated by two or three low hills. Obliquely to the oval of the islet, a stream flowed through a wide meadow and emptied into the sea on the western shore through a narrow mouth.

"The field is limited," said Harbert.

— Yes, replied Pencroff, it would have been a little too small for us!

"And what's more," replied the reporter, "it seems uninhabited."

"Indeed," replied Harbert, "nothing there betrays the presence of man."

"Let's go downstairs," said Pencroff, "and look for it."

The sailor and his two companions returned to the shore, to the place where they had left the Bonadventure.

They had decided to walk around the islet before venturing inside, so that no point would escape their investigations.

The beach was easy to follow, and in only a few places did large rocks interrupt it, which could easily be bypassed. The explorers headed south, scaring away numerous flocks of water birds and herds of seals that threw themselves into the sea as soon as they could see them.

"These animals," the reporter observed, "are not seeing humans for the first time. They fear them, therefore they know them."

An hour after their departure, all three had arrived at the southern tip of the islet, ending in a sharp cape, and they headed north along the western coast, also made up of sand and rocks, which was bordered in the background by thick woods.

Nowhere was there any trace of habitation, nowhere the imprint of a human foot, on the entire perimeter of the islet, which, after four hours of walking, was entirely covered.

This was at least highly extraordinary, and one had to believe that Tabor Island was not, or was no longer, inhabited. Perhaps, after all, the document was already several months or even years old, and it was possible, in that case, either that the shipwrecked man had been repatriated, or that he had died of poverty.

Pencroff, Gideon Spilett and Harbert, forming more or less plausible hypotheses, quickly dined on board the Bonadventure, so as to resume their excursion and continue it until nightfall.

This was done at five o'clock in the evening, when they ventured into the woods. Many animals fled at their approach, mainly, one might even say exclusively, goats and pigs, which, it was easy to see, belonged to European breeds. No doubt some whaler had landed them on the island, where they had quickly multiplied.

Harbert vowed to take one or two live pairs to bring back to Lincoln Island.

It was therefore no longer in doubt that men, at some time, had visited this islet. And this seemed even more evident when, through the forest, paths were traced, tree trunks felled with axes appeared, and everywhere the mark of human work; but these trees, which were falling into rot, had been felled for many years already, the axe marks were velvety with moss, and the grasses grew, long and thick, through the paths, which it was difficult to recognize.

“But,” Gideon Spilett observed, “this proves that not only did men land on this islet, but that they inhabited it for some time. Now, who were these men? How many were there? How many remain?”

— The document, said Harbert, only mentions one shipwrecked person.

"Well, if he's still on the island," replied Pencroff, "it's impossible that we won't find him!"

The exploration continued. The sailor and his companions naturally followed the road that cut diagonally across the islet, and they thus came to the edge of the stream that flowed towards the sea.

While the presence of animals of European origin and some evidence of human activity undeniably demonstrated that humans had already visited the island, several plant specimens proved it no less. In certain places, amidst clearings, it was clear that the land had been planted with vegetables, probably in a rather remote era. So, how delighted Harbert was when he recognized potatoes, chicory, sorrel, carrots, cabbages, and turnips—seeds that could easily be harvested to enrich the soil of Lincoln Island!

"Good! Very well!" replied Pencroff. "That will suit Nab and us just fine. If we don't find the shipwrecked man, at least our journey will not have been in vain, and God will have rewarded us!"

"No doubt," replied Gideon Spilett; "but seeing the state in which these plantations are found, one can fear that the islet has not been inhabited for a long time."

"Indeed," replied Harbert, "no inhabitant, whoever he might be, would have neglected such an important crop!"

"Yes!" said Pencroff, "that shipwrecked man has left!... that is to be assumed..."

— So we must admit that the document is quite old?

- Obviously.

— And that this bottle only arrived at Lincoln Island after floating on the sea for a long time?

"Why not?" replied Pencroff. "But night is coming," he added, "and I think it's best to suspend our search."

"Let's get back on board, and tomorrow we'll start again," said the reporter.

This was the wisest course of action, and the advice was about to be followed, when Harbert, pointing to a confused mass among the trees, cried out:

"A dwelling!" they shouted immediately, and all three headed towards the indicated dwelling. In the twilight glow, it was possible to see that it had been built of planks covered with thick tarpaulin.

The door, half-closed, was pushed open by Pencroff, who entered with a quick step... the house was empty!

CHAPTER XIV

Pencroff, Harbert and Gideon Spilett remained silent in the darkness.

Pencroff called out in a loud voice. There was no answer.

The sailor then struck his flint and lit a twig. This light illuminated for a moment a small room, which appeared to be completely deserted. At the far end was a crude fireplace, with some cold ashes supporting a bundle of dry wood. Pencroff threw the burning twig onto it; the wood crackled and gave off a bright glow.

The sailor and his two companions then saw a bed in disarray, whose damp and yellowed blankets proved that it had not been used for a long time; in a corner of the fireplace, two kettles covered in rust and an overturned pot; a wardrobe, with some half-moldy sailor's clothes; on the table, a pewter cutlery and a bible eaten away by damp; in a corner, some tools, shovel, pickaxe, pick, two hunting rifles, one of which was broken; on a plank forming a shelf, a barrel of powder still intact, a barrel of lead and several boxes of primers; all covered with a thick layer of dust, which many years, perhaps, had accumulated.

"There's nobody here," said the reporter.

"Nobody!" replied Pencroff.

"It's been a long time since this room was inhabited," Harbert observed.

— Yes, for a very long time! replied the reporter.

"Mr. Spilett," said Pencroff then, "instead of returning to the ship, I think it would be better to spend the night in this house."

"You're right, Pencroff," replied Gideon Spilett, "and if its owner returns, well! He might not complain about finding the place taken!"

"He won't come back!" said the sailor, shaking his head.

"Do you think he left the island?" asked the reporter.

“If he had left the island, he would have taken his weapons and tools with him,” replied Pencroff. “You know how much shipwrecked sailors value these things, which are the last remnants of the shipwreck.” “No! No!” repeated the sailor firmly, “No! He hasn’t left the island! If he had saved himself in a boat he had built himself, he would have been even less likely to abandon these essential items! No, he is on the island!”

"Alive?" asked Harbert.

"Alive or dead. But if he's dead, he didn't bury himself, I suppose," replied Pencroff, "and we'll at least find his remains!"

It was therefore agreed that they would spend the night in the abandoned dwelling, and that a supply of wood found in a corner would

provide sufficient heat. With the door closed, Pencroff, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett sat on a bench, speaking little but thinking deeply. They were in a state of mind to assume anything, to expect anything, and they listened eagerly to the sounds outside. Had the door suddenly opened, and a man appeared before them, they would not have been particularly surprised, despite the abandonment of the house, and their hands were ready to shake the hands of this man, this shipwrecked soul, this unknown friend whom friends were waiting for!

But no sound was heard, the door did not open, and the hours passed in this way. How long that night seemed to the sailor and his two companions! Only Harbert had slept for two hours, for, at his age, sleep is a necessity. All three of them were eager to resume their exploration of the previous day and to search this islet to its most secret corners! The conclusions drawn by Pencroff were absolutely correct, and it was almost certain that, since the house was abandoned and the tools, utensils, and weapons were still there, its inhabitant had succumbed. It was therefore necessary to search for his remains and at least give them a Christian burial.

Day broke. Pencroff and his companions immediately proceeded to examine the dwelling.

It had been built, truly, in a fortunate location, on the slope of a small hill sheltered by five or six magnificent gum trees. In front of its facade, and through the trees, the axe had cleared a wide opening, allowing the view to stretch out to sea. A small lawn, enclosed by a crumbling wooden fence, led to the shore, on the left of which opened the mouth of the stream.

This dwelling had been built of planks, and it was easy to see that these planks came from the hull or deck of a ship. It was therefore probable that a disabled vessel had been wrecked on the island, that at least one crewman had been rescued, and that, using the ship's wreckage, this man, having tools at his disposal, had built this dwelling.

And this became even more evident when Gideon Spilett, after circling the dwelling, saw on a plank—probably one of those that formed the bulwarks of the wrecked ship—these letters, already half-erased: Br.tan.. a

"Britannia!" cried Pencroff, whom the reporter had called, "that's a common name for many ships, and I couldn't tell if this one was English or American!"

— It doesn't matter, Pencroff!

“It doesn’t matter,” replied the sailor, “and if the survivor of his crew is still alive, we will save him, whatever country he may be from! But

before we resume our exploration, let us first return to the Bonadventure!”

A kind of anxiety had gripped Pencroff concerning his boat. What if the islet was inhabited, and if some inhabitant had taken possession... but he shrugged at this improbable supposition.

Nevertheless, the sailor was not unhappy to go on board for lunch. The route, already mapped out, was not long—barely a mile.

So we set off again, scanning the woods and thickets, through which goats and pigs were fleeing by the hundreds.

Twenty minutes after leaving the house, Pencroff and his companions saw the eastern coast of the island again and the Bonadventure, held by its anchor, biting deep into the sand.

Pencroff could not hold back a sigh of satisfaction.

After all, that boat was his child, and fathers have the right to be worried more than is often reasonable.

We went back on board, had lunch, so that we would only need dinner very late; then, the meal finished, the exploration was resumed and conducted with the most meticulous care.

In short, it was highly probable that the islet's sole inhabitant had perished. It was more likely a dead man than a living one whose traces

Pencroff and his companions were trying to find! But their search was fruitless, and for half the day they searched in vain through the thickets of trees that covered the islet. They had to admit then that, if the shipwrecked man was indeed dead, no trace of his body remained, and that some wild animal had undoubtedly devoured him down to the last bone.

"We will set off again tomorrow at daybreak," said Pencroff to his two companions, who, around two o'clock in the afternoon, lay down in the shade of a clump of pine trees, in order to rest for a few moments.

"I believe we can, without scruple," added Harbert, "take the utensils that belonged to the shipwrecked man?"

"I believe so too," replied Gideon Spilett, "and these weapons and tools will complement the equipment at Granite House. If I'm not mistaken, the supply of powder and lead is substantial."

"Yes," replied Pencroff, "but let's not forget to capture one or two pairs of those pigs, which Lincoln Island lacks..."

— Nor to harvest these seeds, added Harbert, which will give us all the vegetables of the old and new continents.

"It might be appropriate then," said the reporter, "to stay another day on Tabor Island, in order to gather everything that might be useful to us."

“No, Mr. Spilett,” replied Pencroff, “and I would ask you to leave first thing tomorrow, at daybreak. The wind seems to be shifting to the west, and, having had a favorable wind on our way here, we will have a favorable wind on our way back.”

"Then let's not waste any time!" said Harbert, standing up.

“Let’s not waste any time,” replied Pencroff. “Harbert, you take care of harvesting those seeds, which you know better than we do. Meanwhile, Mr. Spilett and I will go pig hunting, and even without Top, I’m sure we’ll manage to catch a few!”

Harbert therefore took the path that was to lead him back to the cultivated part of the islet, while the sailor and the reporter went directly into the forest.

Many specimens of the pig breed fled from them, and these animals, singularly agile, did not seem in the mood to be approached.

However, after half an hour of pursuit, the hunters had managed to capture a couple who had taken refuge in a thicket, when cries rang out a few hundred paces to the north of the islet. These cries were mingled with horrible, inhuman groans.

Pencroff and Gideon Spilett stood up, and the pigs took advantage of this movement to escape, just as the sailor was preparing ropes to tie them up.

"That's Harbert's voice!" said the reporter.

"Let's run!" cried Pencroff.

And immediately the sailor and Gideon Spilett moved with all the speed of their legs towards the place from which these cries were coming.

They did well to hurry, for, at the turn of the path, near a clearing, they saw the young boy overcome by a wild creature, a gigantic monkey no doubt, which was about to do him harm.

To throw themselves upon this monster, to overpower it in turn, to wrest Harbert from it, and then to hold him securely, was the work of a moment for Pencroff and Gideon Spilett. The sailor was of Herculean strength, the reporter very robust as well, and, despite the monster's resistance, he was firmly bound, so as not to be able to move.

“Are you in no trouble, Herbert? asked Gideon Spilett.

— No! No!

"Ah! If that monkey had hurt you!" cried Pencroff.

"But it's not a monkey!" replied Harbert.

At these words, Pencroff and Gideon Spilett looked at the strange creature lying on the ground. Truly, it was not a monkey! It was a human being, it was a man! But what a man! A savage, in every horrible

sense of the word, and all the more terrifying because he seemed to have fallen into the deepest degree of depravity!

Bristling hair, an unkempt beard reaching down to his chest, a nearly naked body except for a scrap of blanket over his loins, fierce eyes, enormous hands, disproportionately long nails, a complexion as dark as mahogany, feet hardened as if they were made of horn: such was the miserable creature that, nevertheless, had to be called a man!

But we really had the right to wonder whether there was still a soul in that body, or whether only the vulgar instinct of the brute had survived in him!

"Are you quite sure that it was a man or that he was?" Pencroff asked the reporter.

"Alas! There is no doubt about it," he replied.

"So that would be the shipwrecked man?" said Harbert.

“Yes,” replied Gideon Spilett, “but the unfortunate man is no longer human!”

The reporter was right. It was clear that if the shipwrecked man had ever been a civilized being, isolation had turned him into a savage, and worse, perhaps, a true woodsman. Harsh sounds came from his throat, between his teeth, which had the sharpness of carnivores' teeth, made

for grinding nothing but raw flesh. His memory must have abandoned him long ago, no doubt, and he had long since forgotten how to use his tools, his weapons, he no longer knew how to make a fire! He was clearly agile, supple, but all his physical qualities had developed at the expense of his moral ones!

Gideon Spilett spoke to him. He seemed not to understand, nor even to hear... And yet, looking him straight in the eyes, the reporter thought he saw that all reason was not extinguished in him.

However, the prisoner did not struggle, nor did he try to break his bonds. Was he overwhelmed by the presence of these men, of whom he had once been one? Did he find in some corner of his mind some fleeting memory that brought him back to humanity? Had he been free, would he have tried to escape, and where would he have remained? We do not know, but this was not tested, and after examining the wretch with the utmost attention:

"Whoever he is," said Gideon Spilett, "whoever he has been and whatever he may become, it is our duty to bring him back with us to Lincoln Island!"

— Yes! Yes! replied Harbert, and perhaps, with care, we can awaken in him some glimmer of intelligence!

"The soul does not die," said the reporter, "and it would be a great satisfaction to rescue this creature of God from its stupor!"

Pencroff shook his head doubtfully.

"We must try it, in any case," replied the reporter, "and humanity demands it."

It was, in fact, their duty as civilized and Christian beings. All three understood this, and they knew full well that Cyrus Smith would approve of their actions.

"Shall we leave him tied up?" asked the sailor.

"Perhaps he would walk if we untied his feet?" said Harbert.

"Let's try," replied Pencroff.

The ropes that bound the prisoner's feet were untied, but his arms remained tightly bound. He rose of his own accord and showed no sign of wanting to escape. His dry eyes fixed sharply on the three men walking near him, and there was no indication that he remembered being like them, or even having been. A continuous hiss escaped his lips, and his expression was fierce, but he made no attempt to resist. On the reporter's advice, the unfortunate man was taken back to his home. Perhaps the sight of his belongings would make some impression on him!

Perhaps all it took was a spark to revive his clouded thoughts, to rekindle his extinguished soul!

The house was not far away. In a few minutes, they all arrived there; but there, the prisoner recognized nothing, and it seemed that he had lost consciousness of everything! What could one conjecture about this degree of stupefaction to which this miserable being had fallen, except that his imprisonment on the islet dated back a long time, and that after arriving there in a reasonable state, isolation had reduced him to such a state?

The reporter then had the idea that the sight of the fire might have an effect on him, and, in an instant, one of those beautiful blazes that attract even animals lit up the hearth.

The sight of the flame seemed at first to fix the attention of the unfortunate man; but soon he recoiled, and his unconscious gaze was extinguished.

Obviously, there was nothing to be done, for the moment at least, but to bring him back on board the Bonadventure, which was done, and there he remained under Pencroff's care.

Harbert and Gideon Spilett returned to the islet to complete their work, and a few hours later, they came back to shore, bringing with them utensils and weapons, a harvest of vegetable seeds, some game,

and two pairs of pigs. Everything was loaded onto the ship, and the Bonadventure stood ready to set sail as soon as the next morning's tide came in.

The prisoner had been placed in the forward room, where he remained calm, silent, deaf and mute all at once.

Pencroff offered him food, but he rejected the cooked meat that was presented to him, which no doubt no longer suited him. And indeed, when the sailor showed him one of the ducks that Harbert had killed, he pounced on it with bestial greed and devoured it.

"Do you think he'll come back?" said Pencroff, shaking his head.

"Perhaps," replied the reporter. "It's not impossible that our care will eventually have an effect on him, because it's isolation that has made him who he is, and he won't be alone anymore!"

"The poor man has probably been in this state for a long time!" said Harbert.

"Perhaps," replied Gideon Spilett.

"How old could he be?" asked the young boy.

"That's hard to say," replied the reporter, "because it's impossible to see his features under the thick beard that covers his face, but he's no longer young, and I suppose he must be at least fifty years old."

"Have you noticed, Mr. Spilett, how deeply set his eyes are under their brows?" asked the young boy.

— Yes, Harbert, but I would add that they are more human than one would be tempted to believe from their appearance.

“Well, we shall see,” replied Pencroff, “and I am curious to know Mr. Smith’s judgment of our savage. We went looking for a human being, and we bring back a monster! Oh well, we do what we can!”

The night passed, and whether the prisoner slept or not is unknown, but in any case, although he had been untied, he did not move. He was like those wild beasts that are overwhelmed by the first moments of captivity and later seized by rage. At daybreak the next day—October 15—the change in weather predicted by Pencroff had occurred. The wind had shifted to the northwest, favoring the Bonadventure's return; but at the same time, it was freshening and would make navigation more difficult.

At five o'clock in the morning, the anchor was raised. Pencroff reefed its mainsail and set a course to the east-northeast, so as to sail directly towards Lincoln Island.

The first day of the crossing was marked by no incident. The prisoner had remained calm in the forward cabin, and as he had been a sailor, it

seemed that the agitations of the sea produced a kind of salutary reaction in him.

Did some memory of his former profession come back to him? In any case, he remained calm, surprised rather than dejected.

The next day—October 16—the wind freshened considerably, shifting even further north, and consequently, in a direction less favorable to the Bonadventure's progress, as it bounced across the waves. Pencroff soon found himself sailing close-hauled, and, without saying a word, began to worry about the state of the sea, which was breaking violently over the bow of his boat.

Certainly, if the wind didn't change, it would take him longer to reach Lincoln Island than it had taken to reach Tabor Island. Indeed, on the morning of the 17th, the Bonadventure had been at sea for forty-eight hours, and there was no indication that he was in the vicinity of the island. Moreover, it was impossible to estimate the distance covered by dead reckoning, as the course and speed had been too erratic.

Twenty-four hours later, there was still no land in sight. The wind was now blowing strongly, and the sea was treacherous. The boat's sails, which were being battered by waves, had to be quickly maneuvered, reefed, and the tacks frequently changed, making short tacks. It even happened that, on the 18th, the Bonadventure was completely

swamped by a wave, and if its passengers hadn't taken the precaution of tying themselves to the deck beforehand, they would have been swept overboard.

On this occasion, Pencroff and his companions, very busy freeing themselves, received unexpected help from the prisoner, who rushed out of the hatch, as if his sailor's instinct had taken over, and broke the bulwarks with a vigorous blow of his spar, in order to make the water that filled the deck flow out more quickly; then, the boat freed, without having uttered a word, he went back down to his room.

Pencroff, Gideon Spilett and Harbert, absolutely stunned, had let him do it.

However, the situation was bad, and the sailor had reason to believe he was lost on this immense sea, with no possibility of finding his way back!

The night of the 18th to the 19th was dark and cold. However, around eleven o'clock, the wind calmed, the swell subsided, and the Bonadventure, less tossed about, gained greater speed. Moreover, it had handled the sea remarkably well.

Neither Pencroff, nor Gideon Spilett, nor Harbert thought of taking even an hour's sleep. They kept watch with extreme care, for either Lincoln Island could not be far away, and they would know of it at

daybreak, or the Bonadventure, carried by currents, had drifted downwind, and it would then become almost impossible to correct its course.

Pencroff, worried to the highest degree, did not despair, however, for he had a strongly tempered soul, and, sitting at the helm, he stubbornly sought to pierce this thick shadow that enveloped him.

Around two o'clock in the morning, he suddenly got up:

"Fire! Fire!" he cried.

And indeed, a bright light appeared twenty miles to the northeast. Lincoln Island was there, and this light, evidently lit by Cyrus Smith, showed the way forward.

Pencroff, who was heading much too far north, changed his course, and he set his course for that fire which shone above the horizon like a first-magnitude star.

CHAPTER XV

The next day, — October 20 — at seven o'clock in the morning, after four days of travel, the Bonadventure gently ran aground on the shore at the mouth of the Mercy.

Cyrus Smith and Nab, very worried about the bad weather and the prolonged absence of their companions, had gone up to the Grande-vue plateau at dawn, and they had finally seen the boat that had taken so long to return!

"Thank God! Here they are!" exclaimed Cyrus Smith.

As for Nab, in his joy, he began to dance, to turn around, clapping his hands and shouting: "Oh! My master!" a pantomime more touching than the most beautiful speech!

The engineer's first thought, when counting the people he could see on the deck of the Bonadventure, was that Pencroff had not found the shipwrecked man from Tabor Island, or that, at the very least, this unfortunate man had refused to leave his island and exchange his prison for another.

And indeed, Pencroff, Gideon Spilett, and Harbert were alone on the deck of the Bonadventure. The moment the vessel docked, the engineer and Nab were waiting for it on the shore, and before the passengers had jumped onto the sand, Cyrus Smith told them:

"We were very worried about your delay, my friends! Has something bad happened to you?"

"No," replied Gideon Spilett, "and everything went wonderfully, on the contrary. We'll tell you about it."

— However, continued the engineer, you have failed in your search, since there are only three of you as at the start?

"Excuse me, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor, "there are four of us!"

— Have you found this shipwrecked man?

- Yes.

— And you brought him back?

- Yes.

- Alive?

- Yes.

— Where is he? What is he?

"It is," replied the reporter, "or rather, it was a man! That, Cyrus, is all we can tell you!"

The engineer was immediately informed of what had happened during the voyage. He was told under what conditions the searches had been conducted, how the only dwelling on the islet had long been abandoned, and finally how a shipwrecked man who seemed no longer to belong to the human species had been captured.

"And it's gotten to the point," added Pencroff, "that I don't know if we did the right thing by bringing him here."

"Indeed, you did well, Pencroff!" replied the engineer briskly.

— But this unfortunate man has lost his reason?

“Now it’s possible,” replied Cyrus Smith; “but only a few months ago this unfortunate fellow was a man like you and me. And who knows what would become of the last of us alive after a long solitude on this island? Woe to him who is alone, my friends, and it must be believed that isolation quickly destroys reason, since you found this poor man in such a state!”

"But, Mr. Cyrus," asked Harbert, "what leads you to believe that this unfortunate man's mental decline dates back only a few months?"

"Because the document we found had been recently written," replied the engineer, "and only the shipwrecked man could have written this document."

— Unless, however, Gideon Spilett observed, it was written by a companion of this man, who has since died.

— That's impossible, my dear Spilett.

"Why is that?" asked the reporter.

"Because the document mentioned two shipwrecked men," replied Cyrus Smith, "and it only mentions one."

Harbert recounted in a few words the incidents of the crossing and insisted on this curious fact of a kind of temporary resurrection which

had taken place in the mind of the prisoner, when, for a moment, he had become a sailor again at the height of the storm.

“Well, Harbert,” replied the engineer, “you are right to attach great importance to this fact. This unfortunate man cannot be incurable, and it is despair that has made him what he is. But here, he will find his fellow men again, and since he still has a soul within him, we will save that soul!”

The shipwrecked man from Tabor Island, to the great pity of the engineer and to the great astonishment of Nab, was then extracted from the cabin he occupied on the front of the Bonadventure, and, once on land, he first showed a desire to flee.

But Cyrus Smith, approaching, placed his hand on his shoulder with an authoritative gesture, and looked at him with infinite gentleness. Immediately, the unfortunate man, experiencing a kind of instant domination, gradually calmed down, his eyes lowered, his brow bowed, and he offered no further resistance.

"Poor abandoned creature!" murmured the engineer.

Cyrus Smith had observed him closely. Judging by appearance, this miserable being no longer had anything human about him, and yet Cyrus Smith, as the reporter had already done, caught in his eyes a kind of elusive glimmer of intelligence.

It was decided that the abandoned man, or rather the unknown man —for that was how his new companions henceforth referred to him— would remain in one of the rooms of Granite House, from which, moreover, he could not escape. He allowed himself to be led there without difficulty, and, with proper care, perhaps it could be hoped that one day he would become one more companion to the settlers of Lincoln Island.

Cyrus Smith, during lunch, which Nab had hastened, — the reporter, Harbert and Pencroff dying of hunger, — was told in detail all the incidents which had marked the exploratory trip to the islet.

He agreed with his friends on this point, that the stranger must be English or American, because the name Britannia suggested it, and, moreover, through that unkempt beard, under that bush which served as his hair, the engineer thought he recognized the characteristic features of an Anglo-Saxon.

"But, by the way," said Gideon Spilett, addressing Harbert, "you haven't told us how you met that savage; and we know nothing, except that he would have strangled you, if we hadn't been lucky enough to arrive in time to rescue you!"

“Well,” replied Harbert, “I would be hard-pressed to explain what happened. I was, I believe, busy gathering plants when I heard what

sounded like an avalanche falling from a very tall tree. I barely had time to turn around… this unfortunate fellow, who was doubtless huddled in a tree, had rushed at me in less time than it takes me to tell you, and without Mr. Spilett and Mr. Pencroff…”

"My child!" said Cyrus Smith, "you have run a real risk there, but perhaps, without that, this poor creature would always have eluded your search, and we would not have one more companion."

"So you hope, Cyrus, to succeed in making him a man again?" asked the reporter.

"Yes," replied the engineer.

After lunch, Cyrus Smith and his companions left Granite-House and returned to the shore.

The Bonadventure was then unloaded, and the engineer, having examined the weapons and tools, saw nothing that would allow him to establish the identity of the unknown man.

The capture of pigs at the islet was considered to be very profitable for Lincoln Island, and these animals were taken to the stables, where they were expected to acclimatize easily.

The two barrels containing powder and lead, along with the packets of primers, were very well received. It was even agreed to establish a

small powder magazine, either outside Granite House or even in the upper cavern, where there was no risk of explosion. However, the use of pyroxylin had to be continued, as this substance gave excellent results, and there was no reason to substitute it with ordinary gunpowder.

When the unloading of the boat was complete:

"Mr. Cyrus," said Pencroff, "I think it would be prudent to put our Bonadventure in a safe place."

"Isn't it properly situated at the mouth of the Mercy?" asked Cyrus Smith.

"No, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor. "Half the time it's grounded on the sand, and that tires it out. You see, it's a good boat, and it handled admirably during that gale that hit us so violently on the return journey."

— Couldn't we keep it afloat in the river itself?

— No doubt, Mr. Cyrus, it could be done, but this mouth offers no shelter, and, with easterly winds, I believe the Bonadventure would suffer greatly from the sea's blows.

— Well, where do you want to put it, Pencroff?

"At the balloon port," replied the sailor. "This little cove, covered by rocks, seems to me to be just the port it needs."

— Isn't it a bit far away?

— Bah! It's not more than three miles from Granite-House, and we have a nice straight road to get there!

"Go ahead, Pencroff, and sail your Bonadventure," replied the engineer, "and yet I would prefer her under our closer supervision. When we have the time, we will have to build her a small harbor."

"Fantastic!" exclaimed Pencroff. "A port with a lighthouse, a breakwater, and a dry dock! Ah! Really, with you, Mr. Cyrus, everything becomes too easy!"

“Yes, my good Pencroff,” replied the engineer, “but on the condition, however, that you help me, for you are three-quarters responsible for all our work!”

Harbert and the sailor therefore re-embarked on the Bonadventure, whose anchor was raised, sail hoisted, and which the offshore wind quickly carried to Cape Claw. Two hours later, it rested on the calm waters of the port.

During the first few days the stranger spent at Granite-House, had he already given any indication that his savage nature had changed? Did a brighter light shine in the depths of that darkened mind? Was his soul, at last, returning to his body?

Yes, certainly, and to such an extent that Cyrus Smith and the reporter wondered if the unfortunate man's reason had ever been completely extinguished.

At first, accustomed to the open air and the boundless freedom he enjoyed on Tabor Island, the stranger displayed some simmering anger, and there was concern that he might throw himself onto the shore from one of the windows of Granite House. But little by little he calmed down, and he was allowed to move about freely.

There was therefore reason to hope, and a lot of it. Already, forgetting his carnivorous instincts, the stranger accepted food less bestial than that which he had been eating on the islet, and cooked meat no longer produced in him the feeling of repulsion that he had shown on board the Bonadventure.

Cyrus Smith had taken advantage of a moment when he was asleep to cut off his unkempt hair and beard, which formed a sort of mane and gave him such a wild appearance. He had also dressed him more appropriately, after removing the tattered garment that covered him.

As a result, thanks to these efforts, the stranger regained a human appearance, and it even seemed that his eyes had become softer again. Certainly, when intelligence once illuminated him, this man's face must have possessed a certain beauty.

Every day, Cyrus Smith made it a point to spend a few hours in his company. He came to work near him and occupied himself with various tasks, so as to hold his attention. Indeed, a flash of inspiration could be enough to rekindle that soul, a memory to flash through his mind and restore reason. This had been clearly seen during the storm, aboard the Bonadventure!

The engineer also made sure to speak aloud, so as to penetrate, through both hearing and sight, to the very depths of that dulled mind. Sometimes one of his companions, sometimes another, sometimes all of them, joined him. They mostly talked about things related to the navy, which would be of particular interest to a sailor. At times, the stranger paid only vague attention to what was being said, and the colonists soon became convinced that he understood them in part. Sometimes even the expression on his face was profoundly sorrowful, proof that he was suffering inwardly; for his appearance could not have deceived anyone to such an extent; but he did not speak, although on several occasions, however, one might have thought that a few words were about to escape his lips.

Whatever the case may be, the poor creature was calm and sad! But was his calm only apparent?

Was his sadness merely a consequence of his captivity? Nothing could be said for certain yet.

Seeing only certain objects and within a limited field of vision, constantly in contact with the colonists, to whom he would eventually become accustomed, having no desires to satisfy, better fed, better clothed, it was natural that his physical nature should gradually change; but had he been imbued with a new life, or, to use a word that could aptly apply to him, had he merely become tame like an animal towards its master? This was an important question, which Cyrus Smith was eager to resolve, and yet he did not want to rush his patient!

To him, the stranger was nothing but a sick man! Could he ever be recovering? That's what the engineer observed at every moment!

How he was watching for his soul, if one can speak like that!

He was so ready to seize it!

The colonists followed with genuine emotion all the phases of this treatment undertaken by Cyrus Smith.

They also helped him in this work of humanity, and all of them, except perhaps the unbeliever Pencroff, soon came to share his hope and faith.

The stranger's calm was profound, as has been said, and he showed a kind of attachment to the engineer, whose influence he was visibly

under.

Cyrus Smith therefore resolved to test him, by transporting him to another environment, before the ocean that his eyes were once accustomed to contemplating, at the edge of those forests that would remind him of those where so many years of his life had been spent!

"But," said Gideon Spilett, "can we hope that, once released, he will not escape?"

"That's an experiment worth doing," replied the engineer.

"Good!" said Pencroff. "When that fellow has some space in front of him and feels the fresh air, he'll run off at full speed!"

"I don't believe it," replied Cyrus Smith.

"Let's try," said Gideon Spilett.

"Let's try it," replied the engineer.

That day was October 30th, and consequently, the castaway from Tabor Island had been a prisoner at Granite House for nine days. It was warm, and a bright sun shone down on the island.

Cyrus Smith and Pencroff went to the room occupied by the stranger, whom they found lying near the window and looking at the sky.

"Come, my friend," the engineer told him.

The stranger immediately stood up. His eye fixed on Cyrus Smith, and he followed him, while the sailor walked behind him, not very confident in the results of the experiment.

Upon reaching the door, Cyrus Smith and Pencroff helped him into the elevator, while Nab, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett waited for them at the bottom of Granite House. The awning descended, and within moments everyone was gathered on the beach.

The colonists moved away a little from the unknown, so as to leave it some freedom.

He took a few steps, moving towards the sea, and his eyes shone with extreme animation, but he made no attempt to escape. He watched the small waves that, broken by the islet, came to die on the sand.

"It's still only the sea," observed Gideon Spilett, "and it's possible that it won't inspire him to run away!"

"Yes," replied Cyrus Smith, "we must take him to the plateau, on the edge of the forest. There, the experiment will be more conclusive."

"Besides, he won't be able to escape," Nab observed, "since the bridges are raised."

"Oh!" said Pencroff, "that's just the kind of man to get hung up on a stream like the glycerin creek! He could easily cross it in one bound!"

"We'll see," was all Cyrus Smith would say, his eyes never leaving those of his patient.

He was then led to the mouth of the Mercy, and all of them, going up the left bank of the river, reached the plateau of Grande-vue.

Arriving at the place where the first beautiful trees of the forest grew, their leaves lightly stirred by the breeze, the stranger seemed to inhale with intoxication this penetrating scent that permeated the atmosphere, and a long sigh escaped from his chest!

The settlers stood behind, ready to restrain him if he made any move to escape!

And indeed, the poor creature was about to plunge into the creek that separated him from the forest, and his legs relaxed for a moment like a spring... but almost immediately, he curled up on himself, he half-collapsed, and a large tear flowed from his eye!

"Ah!" cried Cyrus Smith, "so you've become a man again, since you're crying!"

CHAPTER XVI

Yes! The poor man had cried! Some memory, no doubt, had crossed his mind, and, following the expression of Cyrus Smith, he had remade himself a man through tears.

The colonists left him on the plateau for a while, and even moved a little further away, so that he felt free; but he made no attempt to take advantage of this freedom, and Cyrus Smith soon decided to bring him back to Granite House. Two days after this scene, the stranger seemed to want to gradually integrate himself into the common life. It was evident that he could hear and understand, but no less evident that he displayed a strange obstinacy in not speaking to the colonists, for one evening, Pencroff, listening at his bedroom door, heard these words escape his lips: "No! Here! Me! Never!"

The sailor reported these words to his companions.

"There is some painful mystery here!" said Cyrus Smith.

The stranger had begun using the farming tools and was working in the vegetable garden. When he paused in his work, which happened often, he remained as if lost in thought; but, on the engineer's recommendation, the isolation he seemed to wish to maintain was respected. If one of the settlers approached him, he would recoil, and sobs would rise in his chest, as if it were overflowing with grief!

Was it remorse that overwhelmed him so?

It was believable, and Gideon Spilett couldn't help but make this observation one day:

"If he's not speaking, it's because, I believe, he has things that are too serious to say!"

Patience was required. A few days later, on November 3rd, the stranger, working on the set, stopped after dropping his spade to the ground, and Cyrus Smith, who was watching him from a short distance, saw tears again streaming from his eyes. A kind of irresistible pity drew him to him, and he lightly touched his arm.

"My friend?" he said.

The stranger's gaze tried to avoid him, and Cyrus Smith, having wanted to take his hand, stepped back sharply.

"My friend," said Cyrus Smith in a firmer voice, "look at me, I want it!"

The stranger looked at the engineer and seemed to be under his influence, like someone mesmerized by their hypnotist. He wanted to flee. But then a transformation seemed to occur in his face. His eyes flashed. Words tried to escape his lips. He could no longer contain himself!... finally, he folded his arms; then, in a low voice:

"Who are you?" he asked Cyrus Smith.

"Shipwrecked people like you," replied the engineer, deeply moved. "We brought you here, among your own kind."

— My fellow human beings!... I have none!

— You are among friends...

"Friends!... To me! Friends!" cried the stranger, hiding his head in his hands... "No... never... leave me alone! Leave me alone!"

Then he fled towards the plateau overlooking the sea, and there he remained motionless for a long time.

Cyrus Smith had rejoined his companions and was telling them what had just happened.

"Yes! There is a mystery in this man's life," said Gideon Spilett, "and it seems that he only returned to humanity through remorse."

"I don't know what kind of man we've brought back here," said the sailor. "He has secrets..."

“Which we will respect,” replied Cyrus Smith briskly. “If he has committed any fault, he has cruelly atoned for it, and, in our eyes, he is absolved.”

For two hours, the stranger remained alone on the beach, evidently under the influence of memories that replayed his entire past — a disastrous past no doubt — and the settlers, without losing sight of him, did not seek to disturb his isolation.

However, after two hours, he seemed to have made up his mind, and he went to see Cyrus Smith. His eyes were red from the tears he had

shed, but he was no longer crying. His whole face was marked by profound humility. He seemed fearful, ashamed, making himself small, and his gaze was constantly lowered to the ground.

"Sir," he said to Cyrus Smith, "are you and your companions English?"

"No," replied the engineer, "we are American."

"Ah!" said the stranger, and he murmured these words:

"I like that better!"

"And you, my friend?" asked the engineer.

"English," he replied hurriedly.

And, as if these few words had weighed heavily on him to say, he moved away from the shore, which he traversed from the waterfall to the mouth of the Mercy, in a state of extreme agitation.

Then, having passed near Harbert at a certain point, he stopped, and, in a strangled voice:

"Which month?" he asked her.

"December," replied Harbert.

— What year?

— 1866.

"Twelve years! Twelve years!" he cried.

Then he left him abruptly.

Harbert had reported to the colonists the requests and the response that had been made to him.

"This unfortunate man," observed Gideon Spilett, "was no longer aware of the months or the years!"

"Yes!" added Harbert, "and he had already been on the islet for twelve years when we found him there!"

"Twelve years!" replied Cyrus Smith. "Ah! Twelve years of isolation, after a perhaps cursed existence, can certainly alter a man's reason!"

"I am inclined to believe," said Pencroff then, "that this man did not arrive at Tabor Island by shipwreck, but that he was abandoned there as a result of some crime."

"You must be right, Pencroff," replied the reporter, "and if that is the case, it is not impossible that those who left him on the island will come back to look for him one day!"

"And they won't find it anymore," said Harbert.

"But then," Pencroff continued, "we would have to go back, and..."

“My friends,” said Cyrus Smith, “let us not address this matter before we know the facts. I believe this unfortunate man has suffered greatly, that he has paid dearly for his sins, whatever they may be, and that the need to unburden himself is suffocating him. Let us not provoke him

into telling us his story! He will undoubtedly tell it to us, and when we have heard it, we shall see what course of action to take. He alone, moreover, can tell us whether he has retained more than hope, the certainty of being repatriated one day, but I doubt it!”

"And why?" asked the reporter.

Because, if he had been certain of being freed within a specific time, he would have waited for his release and would not have thrown that document into the sea. No, it is more likely that he was condemned to die on that islet and that he would never see his fellow man again!

— But, observed the sailor, there is one thing I cannot explain.

- Which?

— If this man was abandoned on Tabor Island twelve years ago, we can well assume that he had already been in this state of savagery for several years in which we found him!

"That's likely," replied Cyrus Smith.

— So, consequently, he would have written this document several years ago!

— No doubt..., and yet the document seemed to have been recently written!

— Besides, how can we accept that the bottle containing the document took several years to get from Tabor Island to Lincoln Island?

"It's not entirely impossible," replied the reporter. "Couldn't she have been in the vicinity of the island for some time already?"

"No," replied Pencroff, "for it was still afloat. One cannot even suppose that, after remaining more or less long on the shore, it could have been taken over by the sea, for there are rocks all along the south coast, and it would inevitably have been broken up there!"

"Indeed," replied Cyrus Smith, who remained thoughtful.

“And besides,” added the sailor, “if the document were several years old, if it had been locked in that bottle for several years, it would have been damaged by humidity. But that wasn’t the case at all, and it was in perfect condition.”

The sailor's observation was remarkably accurate, and this was an incomprehensible fact, as the document appeared to have been recently written when the colonists found it in the bottle. Furthermore, it gave the precise latitude and longitude coordinates of Tabor Island, implying that its author possessed a fairly comprehensive knowledge of hydrography, which a mere sailor could not possibly have.

"There is, once again, something inexplicable here," said the engineer, "but let us not provoke our new companion into speaking. When he

wishes, my friends, we will be ready to listen!"

During the days that followed, the stranger uttered not a word and never once left the confines of the plateau. He worked the land without wasting a moment, without taking a break, but always apart from everyone else. At mealtimes, he did not return to Granite House, although he had been invited to do so several times, and he contented himself with eating a few raw vegetables. At nightfall, he did not go back to the room assigned to him, but remained there, under some clump of trees, or, when the weather was bad, he huddled in some crevice in the rocks. Thus, he still lived as he had when he had no other shelter than the forests of Tabor Island, and all attempts to persuade him to change his ways having been in vain, the colonists waited patiently. But the moment was finally coming when, imperiously and as if involuntarily driven by his conscience, terrible confessions would escape him.

On November 10th, around eight o'clock in the evening, just as darkness was beginning to fall, the stranger unexpectedly appeared before the colonists, who were gathered under the veranda. His eyes shone strangely, and his whole person had regained the fierce appearance of those dark days.

Cyrus Smith and his companions were astonished to see that, under the influence of a terrible emotion, his teeth were chattering like those of a feverish person.

What was wrong with him? Was the sight of his fellow men unbearable? Had he grown weary of this life in this respectable milieu? Was he overcome by a longing for a life of ignorance? It seemed so, when he was heard speaking in incoherently:

"Why am I here?... what right did you have torn me from my island?... can there be any connection between you and me?... do you know who I am... what I did... why I was there... alone? And who says I wasn't abandoned there... that I wasn't condemned to die there?... do you know my past?... do you know if I haven't stolen, murdered... if I'm not a wretch... a cursed being... fit to live like a wild beast... far from everyone... tell me... do you know?"

The colonists listened without interrupting the wretch, who was almost involuntarily uttering these half-confessions. Cyrus Smith then tried to calm him by approaching him, but he quickly recoiled.

"No! No!" he cried. "Just one word... am I free?"

"You are free," replied the engineer.

"Goodbye then!" he cried, and he ran away like a madman.

Nab, Pencroff, Harbert immediately ran towards the edge of the woods... but they returned alone.

"We have to let him do it!" said Cyrus Smith.

"He'll never come back..." cried Pencroff.

"He will return," replied the engineer.

And many days passed since then; but Cyrus Smith — was it some kind of premonition? — persisted in the unshakeable idea that the unfortunate man would return sooner or later.

"This is the last revolt of this harsh nature," he said, "touched by remorse and terrified by further isolation."

However, work of all kinds continued, both on the Grande-vue plateau and at the corral, where Cyrus Smith intended to build a farm. It goes without saying that the seeds collected by Harbert on Tabor Island had been carefully sown.

The plateau then formed a vast, well-designed, and well-maintained vegetable garden, keeping the settlers constantly busy. There was always work to be done. As the vegetable crops multiplied, it became necessary to enlarge the simple plots, which were tending to become veritable fields and replace the meadows. But fodder was plentiful in other parts of the island, and the onaggas had no fear of ever being

rationed. It was better, moreover, to transform the Grande-Vue plateau, protected by its deep ring of creeks, into a vegetable garden and relocate the meadows, which did not need protection against the depredations of quadrupeds and other animals, to the outskirts. On November 15th, the third harvest took place. What a field it had been, growing in size in the eighteen months since the first grain of wheat had been sown! The second harvest of six hundred thousand grains produced this time four thousand bushels, or more than five hundred million grains! The colony was rich in wheat, because it was enough to sow about ten bushels for the harvest to be assured every year and for everyone, men and beasts, to be able to feed themselves.

The harvest was thus gathered, and the last two weeks of November were devoted to breadmaking. Indeed, they had the grain, but not the flour, and the installation of a mill was necessary. Cyrus Smith could have used the second waterfall that flowed into the Mercy River to power his engine, the first already being occupied in driving the stampers of the fulling mill; but, after discussion, it was decided that a simple windmill would be built on the heights of Grande-vue. The construction of one presented no more difficulty than the other, and it was certain, moreover, that there would be no shortage of wind on this plateau, exposed to the sea breezes.

"Not to mention," said Pencroff, "that this windmill will be more cheerful and will look good in the landscape!"

So they set to work, choosing timbers for the frame and the mill mechanism. Some large sandstone blocks found in the north of the lake could easily be transformed into millstones, and as for the sails, the inexhaustible envelope of the balloon would provide the necessary canvas.

Cyrus Smith drew up the plans, and the mill's location was chosen slightly to the right of the farmyard, near the lake's edge. The entire frame was to rest on a pivot held in heavy timbers, so that it could rotate, along with all the machinery it contained, according to the wind's demands.

This work was accomplished quickly. Nab and Pencroff had become very skilled carpenters and simply had to follow the templates provided by the engineer. Thus, a sort of cylindrical sentry box, a veritable pepperpot turret, topped with a pointed roof, soon rose in the designated spot. The four frames that formed the wings had been firmly set into the main shaft at a certain angle to it, and they were secured with iron tenons. As for the various parts of the internal mechanism—the box designed to hold the two millstones, the bedstone and the runner stone; the hopper, a kind of large, square trough, wide at the top

and narrow at the bottom, which allowed the grain to fall onto the millstones; the oscillating trough used to regulate the flow of grain, whose perpetual ticking earned it the nickname "babillard" (chatterbox); and finally the bolter, which, through the sifting process, separates the bran from the flour—these were all easily made. The tools were good, and the work was not very difficult, for, in short, the components of a mill are very simple. It was only a matter of time.

Everyone had worked on the construction of the mill, and on December 1st [it] was finished.

As always, Pencroff was delighted with his work, and he had no doubt that the device was perfect.

"Now, a good wind," he said, "and we'll grind our first harvest nicely!"

"A good wind, yes," replied the engineer, "but not too much wind, Pencroff."

— Bah! Our mill will only turn faster!

“It doesn’t need to turn so fast,” replied Cyrus Smith. “Experience shows that the greatest amount of work is produced by a mill when the number of revolutions made by the sails in one minute is six times the number of feet traveled by the wind in one second. With a moderate breeze, which gives twenty-four feet per second, it will make sixteen revolutions on the sails in one minute, and no more is needed.”

"Exactly!" exclaimed Harbert, "there's a lovely northeast breeze blowing, which will suit us just fine!"

There was no reason to delay the mill's inauguration, for the settlers were eager to taste the first loaf of bread on Lincoln Island. That morning, therefore, two or three bushels of wheat were ground, and the following day, at lunch, a magnificent loaf, perhaps a little dense, though leavened with brewer's yeast, graced the table at Granite House. Everyone bit into it with gusto, and with what pleasure, one can well imagine!

However, the stranger had not reappeared. Several times, Gideon Spilett and Harbert had searched the forest around Granite House, without encountering him, without finding any trace of him. They were seriously worried about this prolonged disappearance. Certainly, the former savage of Tabor Island could not be bothered by living in these game-rich forests of the Far West, but wasn't there a risk that he might revert to his old ways, and that this independence might rekindle his wild instincts?

However, Cyrus Smith, perhaps through some kind of premonition, still persisted in saying that the fugitive would return.

“Yes, he will return!” he repeated with a confidence his companions could not share. “When that unfortunate man was on Tabor Island, he

knew he was alone! Here, he knows his fellow men are waiting for him! Since he has only half spoken of his past life, that poor repentant man, he will return to tell it all, and on that day he will be ours!”

The event would prove Cyrus Smith right.

On December 3rd, Harbert had left the Grande-vue plateau and gone fishing on the southern shore of the lake. He was unarmed, and until then there had never been any precaution to take, since dangerous animals did not appear in that part of the island.

Meanwhile, Pencroff and Nab were working in the farmyard, while Cyrus Smith and the reporter were busy at the chimneys making soda ash, as the supply of soap had run out.

Suddenly, shouts rang out:

"Help! Help me!"

Cyrus Smith and the reporter, being too far away, had not been able to hear these cries. Pencroff and Nab, abandoning the farmyard in haste, had rushed towards the lake.

But before them, the stranger, whose presence in this place no one could have suspected, crossed the glycerin creek, which separated the plateau from the forest, and leaped onto the opposite bank.

There, Harbert was face to face with a formidable jaguar, similar to the one that had been killed at the Reptile's Headland. Unexpectedly surprised, he stood against a tree, while the animal, crouching, was about to leap... but the stranger, with no other weapons than a knife, rushed at the fearsome beast, which turned against this new adversary.

The struggle was short. The stranger was of prodigious strength and skill. He had seized the jaguar by the throat with a hand as powerful as shears, without worrying if the beast's claws penetrated his flesh, and, with the other, he was searching its heart with his knife.

The jaguar fell. The stranger nudged it with his foot, and it was about to flee just as the colonists arrived at the scene of the fight, when Harbert, grabbing hold of it, cried out:

"No! No! You're not going away!"

Cyrus Smith walked towards the stranger, whose brows furrowed when he saw him approaching. Blood was running down his shoulder under his torn jacket, but he paid no attention to it.

“My friend,” Cyrus Smith told him, “we have just incurred a debt of gratitude towards you. To save our child, you risked your life!”

"My life!" murmured the stranger. "What is it worth? Less than nothing!"

— Are you injured?

- Never mind.

"Will you give me your hand?"

And as Harbert tried to grasp the hand that had just saved him, the stranger crossed his arms, his chest heaved, his gaze clouded, and he seemed to want to flee; but, making a violent effort, and in a brusque tone:

"Who are you?" he said, "and what do you claim to be to me?"

It was the settlers' story he was asking about, and for the first time. Perhaps, once this story was told, he would tell his own? In a few words, Cyrus Smith recounted everything that had happened since their departure from Richmond, how they had gotten out of trouble, and what resources were now available to them.

The stranger listened to him with extreme attention.

Then the engineer said what they all were, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Pencroff, Nab, himself, and he added that the greatest joy they had experienced since their arrival on Lincoln Island was on their return from the islet, when they were able to count one more companion.

At these words, he blushed, his head fell to his chest, and a feeling of confusion spread across his entire person.

"And now that you know us," added Cyrus Smith, "will you give us your hand?"

"No," replied the stranger in a low voice, "no! You are honest people! And me!..."

CHAPTER XVII

These last words confirmed the colonists' premonitions. There was some dark past in this unfortunate man's life, perhaps expiated in the eyes of men, but for which his conscience had not yet absolved him. In any case, the guilty man felt remorse, he repented, and, though his new friends would have cordially clasped the hand they asked of him, he did not feel worthy of extending it to honest people! However, after the jaguar incident, he did not return to the forest, and from that day on he never left the grounds of Granite House. What was the mystery of this existence? Would the stranger ever speak? Only time would tell. In any case, it was agreed that his secret would never be questioned and that they would live with him as if they had suspected nothing.

For a few days, their life together continued as before. Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett worked together, sometimes as chemists, sometimes as physicists. The reporter only left the engineer to hunt with Harbert,

as it would not have been prudent to let the young boy run alone in the forest, and they had to be on their guard.

As for Nab and Pencroff, one day in the stables or the farmyard, another in the corral, not to mention the work at Granite-House, they were not lacking for work.

The stranger worked apart from the others, and had resumed his usual life, not attending meals, sleeping under the trees on the plateau, never mingling with his companions. It truly seemed that the company of those who had saved him was unbearable!

“But then,” Pencroff observed, “why did he call for help from his fellow men? Why did he throw this document into the sea?”

"He will tell us," Cyrus Smith would invariably reply.

- When?

"Perhaps sooner than you think, Pencroff."

And indeed, the day of confession was near.

On December 10th, a week after his return to Granite-House, Cyrus Smith saw the stranger approaching him, who, in a calm voice and humble tone, said to him:

"Sir, I have a request to make of you.

"Speak," replied the engineer; "but first, let me ask you a question."

At these words, the stranger blushed and was about to withdraw. Cyrus Smith understood what was going through the culprit's mind, who was undoubtedly afraid that the engineer would question him about his past!

Cyrus Smith held it with his hand:

“Comrade,” he said, “not only are we your companions, but we are your friends. I wanted to tell you that, and now I am listening.”

The stranger passed his hand over his eyes. He was seized by a kind of trembling, and remained for a few moments unable to utter a word.

"Sir," he said finally, "I have come to ask you to grant me a favor."

- Which?

"Four or five miles from here, at the foot of the mountain, you have a corral for your livestock. These animals need care. Will you allow me to live there with them?"

Cyrus Smith gazed at the unfortunate man for a few moments with a feeling of profound compassion. Then:

"My friend," he said, "the corral has only stables, barely suitable for the animals..."

— That will be good enough for me, sir.

“My friend,” Cyrus Smith continued, “we will never disagree with you in any way. You like living in the corral. Very well. You will, moreover, always be welcome at Granite House. But since you wish to live in the corral, we will make the necessary arrangements to ensure you are properly settled there.”

— No matter what, I'll always be happy there.

"My friend," replied Cyrus Smith, who deliberately emphasized this cordial appellation, "you will leave it to us to judge what we should do in this regard!"

"Thank you, sir," replied the stranger as he withdrew.

The engineer immediately informed his companions of the proposal that had been made to him, and it was decided that a wooden house would be built at the corral and made as comfortable as possible.

That very day, the settlers went to the corral with the necessary tools, and before a week had passed, the house was ready to receive its inhabitant. It had been built about twenty feet from the stables, and from there it would be easy to keep an eye on the herd of bighorn sheep, which then numbered more than eighty head. Some furniture—a bunk, a table, a bench, a wardrobe, and a chest—was made, and weapons, ammunition, and tools were transported to the corral.

The stranger, moreover, had not gone to see his new home, and had left the settlers to work there without him, while he occupied himself on the plateau, no doubt wanting to put the finishing touches on his work. And indeed, thanks to him, all the land was plowed and ready to be sown as soon as the time came.

It was on December 20th that the installations at the corral were completed. The engineer informed the stranger that his dwelling was ready to receive him, and the latter replied that he would go there to sleep that very evening.

That evening, the colonists were gathered in the great hall of Granite House. It was eight o'clock—the time when their companion was to leave them. Not wanting to inconvenience him by imposing a farewell that might have been difficult for him, they left him alone and went back up to Granite House.

They had been talking in the great hall for a few moments when there was a light knock at the door. Almost immediately, the stranger entered, and without further preamble:

"Gentlemen," he said, "before I leave you, it's good that you know my story. Here it is."

These simple words made a very strong impression on Cyrus Smith and his companions.

The engineer had stood up.

"We're not asking anything of you, my friend," he said. "It's your right to remain silent..."

— It is my duty to speak.

— Please sit down.

— I will remain standing.

"We are ready to hear from you," replied Cyrus Smith.

The stranger stood in a corner of the room, somewhat protected by the dim light. He was bareheaded, his arms crossed over his chest, and it was in this posture that, in a muffled voice, speaking as if forcing himself to speak, he told the following story, which his listeners did not interrupt once:

“On December 20, 1854, a steam-powered pleasure yacht, the Duncan, belonging to the Scottish laird, Lord Glenarvan, anchored off Cape Bernoulli, on the west coast of Australia, at the thirty-seventh parallel. On board were Lord Glenarvan, his wife, a major in the British Army, a French geographer, a young girl, and a young boy. The latter two were the children of Captain Grant, whose ship, the Britannia, had been lost with all hands a year earlier. The Duncan was commanded by Captain John Mangles and manned by a crew of fifteen men.”

"This is why this yacht was on the coast of Australia at that time."

"Six months earlier, a bottle containing a document written in English, German, and French had been found in the Irish Sea and picked up by the Duncan. This document stated, in essence, that there were still three survivors of the sinking of the Britannia, that these survivors were Captain Grant and two of his men, and that they had found refuge on a land whose latitude was given in the document, but whose longitude, erased by seawater, was no longer legible.

"This latitude was 37°11' south. Therefore, the longitude being unknown, if one followed this thirty-seventh parallel across the continents and seas, one was certain to arrive on the land inhabited by Captain Grant and his two companions.

"The English Admiralty having hesitated to undertake this search, Lord Glenarvan resolved to try everything to find the captain. Mary and Robert Grant had been put in contact with him. The yacht the Duncan was equipped for a long campaign in which the lord's family and the captain's children wanted to take part, and the Duncan, leaving Glasgow, headed towards the Atlantic, rounded the Strait of Magellan and went up the Pacific to Patagonia, where, according to an initial interpretation of the document, it could be assumed that Captain Grant was a prisoner of the natives.

"The Duncan disembarked its passengers on the west coast of Patagonia and set off again to pick them up on the east coast, at Cape Corrientes.

"Lord Glenarvan crossed Patagonia, following the thirty-seventh parallel, and, having found no trace of the captain, he re-embarked on November 13th, in order to continue his search across the ocean.

"After unsuccessfully visiting the Tristan d'Acunha and Amsterdam islands, situated on its route, the Duncan, as I have said, arrived at Cape Bernoulli, on the Australian coast, on December 20, 1854.

"Lord Glenarvan's intention was to cross Australia as he had crossed America, and he landed. A few miles from the shore was a farm belonging to an Irishman, who offered hospitality to the travelers. Lord Glenarvan explained to this Irishman the reasons that had brought him to these parts, and he asked him if he knew that an English three-masted ship, the Britannia, had been lost less than two years earlier off the west coast of Australia."

"The Irishman had never heard of this shipwreck; but, to the great surprise of those present, one of the Irishman's servants, intervening, said:

“—My lord, praise and thank God. If Captain Grant is still alive, he is alive on Australian soil.”

"— Who are you?" asked Lord Glenarvan.

“— A Scotsman like yourself, my lord,” replied the man, “and I am one of Captain Grant’s companions, one of the survivors of the Britannia.”

"This man's name was Ayrton. He was, in fact, the foreman of the Britannia, as his papers attested. But, separated from Captain Grant at the moment the ship broke up on the reefs, he had believed until then that his captain had perished with the entire crew, and that he, Ayrton, was the sole survivor of the Britannia."

“— However,” he added, “it was not on the west coast, but on the east coast of Australia that the Britannia was lost, and if Captain Grant is still alive, as his document indicates, he is a prisoner of the Australian natives, and it is on the other coast that he must be sought.”

"This man, speaking thus, had a frank voice and a confident gaze. One could not doubt his words. The Irishman, who had him in his service for over a year, vouched for them. Lord Glenarvan believed in this man's loyalty, and, thanks to his advice, he resolved to cross Australia along the thirty-seventh parallel. Lord Glenarvan, his wife, the two children, the major, the Frenchman, Captain Mangles, and a few sailors were to make up the small group under Ayrton's command, while the Duncan, under the command of the second-in-command, Tom Austin, would go to Melbourne, where it would await Lord Glenarvan's instructions."

"They left on December 23, 1854.

"It is time to say that this Ayrton was a traitor. He was, in fact, the foreman of the Britannia; but, following discussions with his captain, he had tried to lead his crew into revolt and seize the ship, and Captain Grant had put him ashore on April 8, 1852, on the west coast of Australia, and then he left, abandoning him — which was only justice.

"So, this wretch knew nothing of the sinking of the Britannia. He had just learned of it from Glenarvan's account! Since his abandonment, he had become, under the name of Ben Joyce, the leader of escaped convicts, and if he shamelessly maintained that the sinking had taken place on the east coast, if he urged Lord Glenarvan to set sail in that direction, it was because he hoped to separate him from his ship, seize the Duncan and turn that yacht into a pirate ship of the Pacific."

Here, the stranger paused for a moment. His voice trembled, but he continued in these words:

"The expedition set off and headed across Australian land. It was naturally unfortunate, since Ayrton or Ben Joyce, as one might call him, led it, sometimes preceded, sometimes followed by his band of convicts, who had been warned of the blow to be made.

"However, the Duncan had been sent to Melbourne for repairs. The task was therefore to persuade Lord Glenarvan to order it to leave

Melbourne and sail to the east coast of Australia, where it would be easy to seize. After leading the expedition quite close to this coast, through vast forests where all resources were scarce, Ayrton obtained a letter, which he undertook to deliver to the Duncan's second-in-command. This letter ordered the yacht to proceed immediately to the east coast, to Twofold Bay, that is, a few days' sail from where the expedition had stopped. It was there that Ayrton had arranged to meet his accomplices."

"Just as the letter was about to be delivered to him, the traitor was unmasked and had no choice but to flee. But this letter, which was to deliver Duncan to him, had to be obtained at all costs. Ayrton managed to seize it, and two days later, he arrived in Melbourne."

"Until then the criminal had succeeded in his odious plans. He was going to be able to lead the Duncan to that Twofold Bay, where it would be easy for the convicts to seize it, and, with his crew massacred, Ben Joyce would become the master of these seas... God had to stop him at the denouement of his sinister designs.

“Ayrton, having arrived in Melbourne, handed the letter to the first mate, Tom Austin, who read it and set sail immediately; but imagine Ayrton’s disappointment and anger when, the day after setting sail, he learned that the first mate was taking the ship not to the east coast of

Australia, to Twofold Bay, but to the east coast of New Zealand. He wanted to object, but Austin showed him the letter!… And, indeed, by a providential error on the part of the French geographer who had written the letter, the east coast of New Zealand was indicated as the destination.”

"All of Ayrton's plans failed! He wanted to revolt. He was imprisoned. He was therefore taken to the coast of New Zealand, no longer knowing what would become of his accomplices, nor what would become of Lord Glenarvan."

"The Duncan remained cruising along that coast until March 3rd. On that day, Ayrton heard detonations. It was the carronades of the Duncan firing, and soon Lord Glenarvan and all his people arrived on board."

"Here's what happened."

"After a thousand hardships and a thousand dangers, Lord Glenarvan had been able to complete his journey and arrive on the east coast of Australia, at Twofold Bay. No Duncan! he telegraphed Melbourne. The reply came: 'Duncan left on the 18th of this month for an unknown destination.'"

"Lord Glenarvan could only think one thing: that the honest yacht had fallen into the hands of Ben Joyce and had become a pirate ship!"

"However, Lord Glenarvan did not want to give up. He was a fearless and generous man. He embarked on a merchant ship, was taken to the west coast of New Zealand, crossed it at the thirty-seventh parallel, without encountering any trace of Captain Grant; but, on the other coast, to his great surprise, and by the will of heaven, he found the Duncan, under the command of the second mate, who had been waiting for him for five weeks!"

"It was March 3, 1855. Lord Glenarvan was aboard the Duncan, but Ayrton was there too. He appeared before the lord, who wanted to extract from him everything the bandit might know about Captain Grant. Ayrton refused to speak. Lord Glenarvan then told him that at the first port of call, he would be handed over to the English authorities. Ayrton remained silent."

"The Duncan resumed its journey along the thirty-seventh parallel. However, Lady Glenarvan attempted to overcome the bandit's resistance. Finally, her influence prevailed, and Ayrton, in exchange for information, offered Lord Glenarvan to abandon him on one of the Pacific islands, instead of handing him over to the English authorities. Lord Glenarvan, determined to learn anything about Captain Grant, agreed."

"Ayrton then recounted his whole life, and it was clear that he had known nothing since the day Captain Grant had landed him on the Australian coast.

"Nevertheless, Lord Glenarvan kept his word. The Duncan continued on its way and arrived at Tabor Island. It was there that Ayrton was to be put ashore, and it was there, too, that by a true miracle, Captain Grant and his two men were found, precisely on that thirty-seventh parallel. The convict was therefore to replace them on this deserted islet, and here, as he left the yacht, are the words Lord Glenarvan spoke: 'Here, Ayrton, you will be far from any land and without any possible communication with your fellow men. You will not be able to flee this islet where the Duncan leaves you. You will be alone, under the eye of a god who reads the depths of hearts, but you will be neither lost nor forgotten as Captain Grant was. Unworthy as you may be of men's memory, men will remember you. I know where you are, Ayrton, and I know where to find you.'" I will never forget it!

"And the Duncan, setting sail, soon disappeared."

"It was March 18, 1855.

“Ayrton was alone, but he lacked neither ammunition, nor weapons, nor tools, nor seeds. The convict had at his disposal the house built by

the honest Captain Grant. He only had to live and atone in isolation for the crimes he had committed.”

"Gentlemen, he repented, he was ashamed of his crimes, and he was truly unhappy! He told himself that if men came looking for him one day on this islet, he must be worthy of returning to them! How he suffered, the wretch! How he toiled to rebuild himself through work! How he prayed to be renewed through prayer!"

"For two years, three years, it was like this; but Ayrton, crushed by isolation, always looking to see if some ship might appear on the horizon of his island, wondering if the time of expiation was soon complete, suffered as no one has ever suffered! Ah! how hard this solitude is, for a soul gnawed by remorse!"

"But no doubt heaven did not find him punished enough, the poor fellow, for he gradually felt himself becoming a savage! He gradually felt the stupor taking hold of him! He cannot tell you whether it was after two or four years of neglect, but finally, he became the wretch you found!"

"I don't need to tell you, gentlemen, that Ayrton or Ben Joyce and I are one and the same!"

Cyrus Smith and his companions stood up at the end of this story. It's hard to describe how moved they were! So much misery, so much pain

and despair laid bare before them!

“Ayrton,” said Cyrus Smith, “you have been a great criminal, but surely heaven must find that you have atoned for your crimes! It has proven it by bringing you back among your fellow men. Ayrton, you are forgiven! And now, will you be our companion?”

Ayrton had stepped back.

"Here's my hand!" said the engineer.

Ayrton rushed to the hand that Cyrus Smith offered him, and large tears flowed from his eyes.

"Do you want to live with us?" asked Cyrus Smith.

"Mr. Smith, leave me a little longer," replied Ayrton, "leave me alone in this corral dwelling!"

"As you wish, Ayrton," replied Cyrus Smith.

Ayrton was about to leave when the engineer asked him one last question:

"One more word, my friend. Since your intention was to live in isolation, why did you throw this document into the sea, the document that put us on your trail?"

"A document?" replied Ayrton, who seemed not to know what he was being told.

"Yes, that document we found, locked in a bottle, which gave the exact location of Tabor Island!"

Ayrton ran his hand over his forehead. Then, after thinking for a moment:

"I have never thrown any document into the sea!" he replied.

"Never?" exclaimed Pencroff.

- Never!"

And Ayrton, bowing, went back to the door and left.

CHAPTER XVIII

"The poor man!" said Harbert, who, after dashing towards the door, returned after seeing Ayrton slide down the elevator rope and disappear into the darkness.

"He will return," said Cyrus Smith.

"Ah, Mr. Cyrus," exclaimed Pencroff, "what does that mean? What! It wasn't Ayrton who threw that bottle into the sea? But who then?"

Without a doubt, if any question had to be asked, it was this one!

"It's him," replied Nab, "only the poor fellow was already half-mad."

"Yes!" said Harbert, and he was no longer aware of what he was doing.

"That can only be explained in this way, my friends," replied Cyrus Smith briskly, "and I now understand how Ayrton could have indicated exactly the situation of Tabor Island, since the very events that had preceded his abandonment on the island made it known to him."

— However, Pencroff observed, if he was not yet a brute when he wrote his document, and if it has been seven or eight years since he threw it into the sea, how is it that this paper has not been altered by moisture?

"That proves," replied Cyrus Smith, "that Ayrton was only deprived of intelligence at a much more recent time than he believes."

"It must be so," replied Pencroff; "otherwise, the thing would be inexplicable."

"Inexplicable indeed," replied the engineer, who seemed not to want to prolong this conversation.

"But did Ayrton tell the truth?" asked the sailor.

"Yes," replied the reporter. "The story he told is true in every respect. I remember very well that the newspapers reported Lord Glenarvan's attempt and the result he obtained."

“Ayrton told the truth,” added Cyrus Smith, “don’t doubt it, Pencroff, for it was cruel enough for him. One speaks the truth when one accuses

oneself like that!”

The next day—December 21—the colonists went down to the beach, and, having climbed the plateau, they no longer found Ayrton there. Ayrton had reached his house by the corral during the night, and the colonists thought it best not to disturb him with their presence. Time would undoubtedly accomplish what encouragement had failed to do.

Harbert, Pencroff, and Nab then resumed their usual activities. Indeed, on that very day, the same work brought Cyrus Smith and the reporter together at the chimney workshop.

"Do you know, my dear Cyrus," said Gideon Spilett, "that the explanation you gave yesterday about this bottle did not satisfy me at all! How can one accept that this unfortunate man could have written this document and thrown this bottle into the sea, without having retained any memory of it?"

— So it wasn't him who threw it away, my dear Spilett.

— So, you still believe...

"I believe nothing, I know nothing!" replied Cyrus Smith, interrupting the reporter. "I simply file this incident among those I have been unable to explain to this day!"

"Truly, Cyrus," said Gideon Spilett, "these things are incredible! Your rescue, the crate washed up on the sand, Top's adventures, that bottle... will we never know the answer to these mysteries?"

"Yes!" replied the engineer quickly, "yes, when I have to search this island down to its very bowels!"

— Perhaps chance will give us the key to this mystery!

“Chance! Spilett! I hardly believe in chance, any more than I believe in the mysteries of this world. There is a cause for everything that happens here that is inexplicable, and I will discover that cause. But in the meantime, let us observe and work.”

January arrived. It was the beginning of 1867. The summer work was carried out diligently. In the days that followed, Harbert and Gideon Spilett, having gone to the corral, were able to see that Ayrton had taken possession of the house that had been prepared for him. He was tending the large flock entrusted to his care, and he was sparing his companions the trouble of coming every two or three days to check on the corral.

However, in order not to leave Ayrton isolated for too long, the colonists visited him quite often.

It was also not indifferent — given certain suspicions shared by the engineer and Gideon Spilett — that this part of the island be subjected

to a certain surveillance, and Ayrton, if any incident occurred, would not neglect to inform the inhabitants of Granite-House.

However, it was possible that the incident might be sudden and require immediate notification to the engineer. Even apart from any events related to the mystery of Lincoln Island, many other occurrences could have arisen that would have called for prompt intervention from the colonists, such as the appearance of a ship passing offshore and within sight of the western coast, a shipwreck on the western landings, the possible arrival of pirates, and so on. Therefore, Cyrus Smith resolved to establish instant communication between the corral and Granite House.

It was on January 10th that he shared his plan with his companions.

"Ah, well! How are you going to do that, Mr. Cyrus?" asked Pencroff. "Would you happen to be considering installing a telegraph?"

— Precisely, replied the engineer.

"Electric?" Harbert exclaimed.

"Electric," replied Cyrus Smith. "We have all the necessary elements to make a battery, and the most difficult part will be drawing iron wires, but with the help of a die, I think we can manage it."

"Well, after that," replied the sailor, "I no longer despair of seeing us one day traveling by train!"

So we set to work, starting with the most difficult part, namely making the wires, because if we had failed, it would have been pointless to make the battery and other accessories.

The iron from Lincoln Island, as is well known, was of excellent quality and, consequently, very suitable for drawing. Cyrus Smith began by making a drawplate, that is, a steel plate pierced with conical holes of various sizes, which were to successively bring the wire to the desired degree of fineness. This piece of steel, after being hardened "to its full hardness," as they say in metallurgy, was fixed firmly to a frame driven deep into the ground, just a few feet from the great waterfall, whose motive power the engineer would again utilize. Indeed, there stood the fulling mill, which was not yet in operation, but whose shaft, driven with tremendous power, could be used to draw the wire by winding it around itself.

The operation was delicate and required a great deal of care.

The iron, previously prepared in long and thin rods, the ends of which had been thinned with a file, having been introduced into the large gauge of the drawplate, was drawn out by the drawing shaft, wound to a length of twenty-five to thirty feet, then unwound and presented

successively to the gauges of smaller diameter! Finally, the engineer obtained wires forty to fifty feet long, which it was easy to join and stretch over the five-mile distance that separated the corral from the enclosure of Granite-House.

It took only a few days to complete this task, and indeed, as soon as the machine was in operation, Cyrus Smith let his companions do the work of wire drawers and took care of making his pile.

The goal, in this instance, was to obtain a constant-current battery. It is known that the components of modern batteries generally consist of retort carbon, zinc, and copper. The engineer was completely lacking copper, having found no trace of it on Lincoln Island despite his searches, and it had to be dispensed with. Retort carbon—that is, the hard graphite found in the retorts of gasworks after the coal has been dehydrogenated—could have been produced, but it would have required the installation of special equipment, which would have been a major undertaking. As for zinc, it is worth recalling that the crate found at the tip of the wreck was lined with a sheath of this metal, which could not have been used more effectively than in this situation.

After careful consideration, Cyrus Smith resolved to build a very simple battery, similar to the one Becquerel designed in 1820, in which

only zinc was used. As for the other substances, nitric acid and potash, they were all readily available to him.

This, then, is how this battery was constructed, the effects of which were to be produced by the reaction of acid and potash. A number of glass flasks were made and filled with nitric acid. The engineer sealed them with a stopper through which passed a glass tube, closed at its lower end and designed to be immersed in the acid by means of a clay pad held in place by a cloth. Into the upper end of this tube, he then poured a solution of potash that he had previously obtained by burning various plants, and in this way, the acid and potash could react with each other through the clay.

Cyrus Smith then took two zinc plates, one of which was immersed in nitric acid, the other in potassium hydroxide solution. Immediately, a current was produced, which went from the plate in the flask to the plate in the tube, and these two plates having been connected by a metal wire, the plate in the tube became the positive pole and the plate in the flask the negative pole of the apparatus.

Each bottle therefore produced as many currents, which, combined, should be sufficient to cause all the phenomena of electric telegraphy.

Such was the ingenious and very simple device that Cyrus Smith built, a device which would allow him to establish telegraphic

communication between Granite-House and the corral.

It was on February 6th that the planting of the poles, fitted with glass partitions, began. These poles were intended to support the wire that would follow the path to the corral. A few days later, the wire was strung, ready to produce, at a speed of one hundred thousand kilometers per second, the electric current that the earth would then carry back to its point of origin. Two batteries had been built, one for Granite House and the other for the corral, because if the corral was to be connected to Granite House, it could also be useful for Granite House to be connected to the corral.

As for the receiver and the manipulator, they were very simple. At both stations, the wire wound around an electromagnet, that is, a piece of soft iron surrounded by a wire. When communication was established between the two poles, the current, starting from the positive pole, passed through the wire, into the electromagnet, which became temporarily magnetized, and returned via the ground to the negative pole. When the current was interrupted, the electromagnet immediately demagnetized. It was therefore sufficient to place a soft iron plate in front of the electromagnet, which, attracted while the current was flowing, fell back when the current was interrupted. With this movement of the plate thus obtained, Cyrus Smith was very easily

able to attach a pointer to a dial, which bore the letters of the alphabet, and, in this way, communicate from one station to the other.

Everything was fully installed on February 12th. On that day, Cyrus Smith, having switched on the current through the wire, asked if everything was all right at the corral, and received, a few moments later, a satisfactory answer from Ayrton.

Pencroff was beside himself with joy, and every morning and every evening he sent a telegram to the corral, which never went unanswered.

This method of communication had two very real advantages: first, it allowed them to confirm Ayrton's presence at the corral, and second, it prevented him from being completely isolated. Moreover, Cyrus Smith never let a week go by without visiting him, and Ayrton came to Granite House from time to time, where he was always warmly welcomed.

The beautiful season passed in this way amidst the usual tasks. The colony's resources, particularly vegetables and grains, increased daily, and the seedlings brought back from Tabor Island had thrived perfectly. The plateau at Grande-Vue presented a very reassuring appearance. The fourth wheat harvest had been remarkable, and, as one might expect, no one thought to count whether the four hundred billion grains were present at harvest time. However, Pencroff had considered doing so, but Cyrus Smith informed him that even if he managed to count

three hundred grains per minute, or nine thousand per hour, it would take him approximately five thousand five hundred years to complete the task, the brave sailor felt he should abandon the idea.

The weather was magnificent, the temperature very hot during the day; but in the evening, sea breezes tempered the heat and provided cool nights for the inhabitants of Granite House. However, there were a few thunderstorms, which, if not long-lasting, struck Lincoln Island with extraordinary force. For several hours, lightning flashed across the sky and the thunder rumbled incessantly.

Around this time, the small colony was extremely prosperous. The barnyard animals were plentiful, and they were living off the surplus, as it was becoming urgent to reduce the population to a more moderate number. The pigs had already produced piglets, and it is understandable that caring for these animals absorbed a large part of Nab and Pencroff's time. The onaggas, which had produced two fine animals, were most often ridden by Gideon Spilett and Harbert, who had become an excellent horseman under the reporter's tutelage, and they were also harnessed to the wagon, either to transport timber and coal to Granite House, or the various mineral products that the engineer used.

Around this time, several reconnaissance expeditions ventured deep into the forests of the Far West. Explorers could go there without fearing extreme temperatures, as the sun's rays barely penetrated the thick canopy that entwined above their heads. They thus explored the entire left bank of the Mercy River, which was bordered by the road that led from the corral to the mouth of the river at the falls.

But, during these excursions, the settlers took care to be well armed, because they frequently encountered certain wild boars, very wild and very ferocious, against which it was necessary to fight seriously.

During that season, a terrible war was also waged against the jaguars. Gideon Spilett harbored a particular hatred for them, and his pupil Harbert was a staunch supporter. Armed as they were, they had little fear of encountering one of these beasts.

Harbert's daring was superb, and the reporter's composure astonishing. As a result, some twenty magnificent pelts already adorned the great hall of Granite-House, and if this continued, the jaguar race would soon be extinct on the island, the very goal pursued by the hunters.

The engineer sometimes took part in various reconnaissance missions carried out in the uncharted parts of the island, which he observed with meticulous attention. He sought tracks other than those

of animals in the thickest sections of these vast forests, but nothing suspicious ever appeared before his eyes. Neither Top nor Jup, who accompanied him, gave any indication by their demeanor that anything extraordinary was happening, and yet, more than once, the dog barked at the mouth of the well that the engineer had explored without success.

It was at this time that Gideon Spilett, assisted by Harbert, took several views of the most picturesque parts of the island, using the camera that had been found in the crate and which had not been used until then.

This apparatus, equipped with a powerful lens, was very complete. Substances necessary for photographic reproduction—collodion for preparing the glass plate, silver nitrate for sensitizing it, sodium thiosulfate for fixing the resulting image, ammonium chloride for soaking the paper intended for the positive print, and sodium acetate and gold chloride for impregnating the latter—nothing was lacking. Even the papers themselves were there, already chlorinated, and before placing them in the holder on top of the negatives, it was simply a matter of soaking them for a few minutes in silver nitrate diluted with water.

The reporter and his assistant thus became, in a short time, skilled operators, and they obtained some rather fine proofs of landscapes, such as the whole of the island, taken from the plateau of Grande-vue, with Mount Franklin on the horizon, the mouth of the Mercy, so picturesquely framed in its high rocks, the clearing and the corral backed against the first ridges of the mountain, the whole curious development of Cape Claw, the point of the wreck, etc.

The photographers made sure to take portraits of all the island's inhabitants, without excluding anyone.

"It populates," said Pencroff.

And the sailor was delighted to see his image, faithfully reproduced, adorning the walls of Granite-House, and he gladly paused before this display as he would have done before the richest shop windows on Broadway.

But, it must be said, the most successful portrait was undoubtedly that of Master Jup. Master Jup had posed with a seriousness impossible to describe, and his image spoke volumes!

"He looks like he's going to make a face!" exclaimed Pencroff.

And if Master Jup had not been pleased, it was because he had been very difficult; but he was, and he contemplated his image with a sentimental air, which let through a slight dose of conceit.

The intense heat of summer ended with the arrival of March. The weather was occasionally rainy, but the air was still warm. This March, which corresponds to September in northern latitudes, was not as beautiful as one might have hoped. Perhaps it heralded an early and harsh winter.

One morning, on the 21st, it was even possible to believe that the first snows had appeared. Indeed, Harbert, having gone early to one of the windows of Granite House, exclaimed:

"Look! The islet is covered in snow!"

"Snow at this time of year?" replied the reporter, who had joined the young boy.

Their companions were soon near them, and they could only observe one thing: that not only the islet, but the entire shore below Granite-House, was covered with a white layer, uniformly spread on the ground.

"That's definitely snow!" said Pencroff.

— Or it looks very much like it! replied Nab.

"But the thermometer reads fifty-eight degrees (14 centigrades above zero)!" observed Gideon Spilett.

Cyrus Smith stared at the white tablecloth without commenting, because he really didn't know how to explain this phenomenon, at this

time of year and in such temperatures.

"A thousand devils!" cried Pencroff, "our crops are going to freeze!"

And the sailor was preparing to disembark, when he was preceded by the agile Jup, who let himself sink to the ground.

But before the orange had touched the ground, the enormous layer of snow rose up and scattered in the air in so many countless flakes that the sunlight was veiled for a few minutes.

"Birds!" cried Harbert.

They were, in fact, swarms of seabirds, with dazzling white plumage. Hundreds of thousands descended upon the islet and the shore, and vanished into the distance, leaving the colonists astonished as if they had witnessed a change of scenery, a magical transition from summer to winter. Unfortunately, the change had been so sudden that neither the reporter nor the young boy managed to shoot down one of these birds, whose species they could not identify. A few days later, on March 26th, two years had passed since the airborne castaways had been cast ashore on Lincoln Island!

CHAPTER XIX

Two years already! And for two years the colonists had had no communication with their fellow humans! They had no news of the

civilized world, lost on this island, as if they were on some tiny asteroid in the solar system! What was happening in their country then? The image of their homeland was still present in their eyes, that homeland torn apart by civil war when they had left it, and which the southern rebellion was perhaps still staining with blood! It was a great sorrow for them, and they often spoke of these things, without ever doubting, however, that the northern cause must triumph for the honor of the American confederacy.

During those two years, not a single ship had passed within sight of the island, or at least not a single sail had been sighted. It was clear that Lincoln Island lay outside the usual shipping lanes, and was even unknown—as the charts proved—for, lacking a harbor, its watering hole should have attracted vessels eager to replenish their water supplies. But the sea surrounding it remained deserted as far as the eye could see, and the colonists had little to rely on but themselves to return home.

However, a chance of salvation existed, and this chance was precisely discussed, one day in the first week of April, by the colonists, who were gathered in the hall of Granite-House.

Specifically, there had been talk of America, and of the homeland, which there was so little hope of ever seeing again.

"Clearly, we will only have one way," said Gideon Spilett, "of leaving Lincoln Island, and that will be to build a vessel large enough to withstand the sea for several hundred miles. It seems to me that, if you've built a longboat, you can certainly build a ship!"

"And one can certainly go to the Pomotou," added Harbert, "when one has been to Tabor Island!"

“I don’t say no,” replied Pencroff, who always had the deciding vote on maritime matters, “I don’t say no, although going near and going far are not quite the same thing! If our longboat had been threatened by some bad gale during the voyage to Tabor Island, we knew that the port was not far off in either direction; but twelve hundred miles to cover is quite a distance, and the nearest land is at least that far away!”

"If the opportunity arises, Pencroff, wouldn't you be willing to give it a try?" asked the reporter.

"I will try whatever you want, Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor, "and you know very well that I am not a man to back down!"

— Note, moreover, that we have one more sailor among us, Nab observed.

"Who then?" asked Pencroff.

— Ayrton.

"That's right," replied Harbert.

"If he would agree to come!" Pencroff remarked.

"Well!" said the reporter, "do you really think that if Lord Glenarvan's yacht had shown up at Tabor Island while he was still living there, Ayrton would have refused to leave?"

“You forget, my friends,” said Cyrus Smith, “that Ayrton was no longer in his right mind during the last years of his stay. But that is not the point. The question is whether we should count the return of the Scottish ship among our chances of salvation. Now, Lord Glenarvan promised Ayrton that he would come to reclaim it at Tabor Island when he judged his crimes sufficiently expiated, and I believe he will return.”

"Yes," said the reporter, "and I would add that he will return soon, for it has been twelve years since Ayrton was abandoned!"

"Well!" replied Pencroff, "I quite agree with you that the lord will return, and soon indeed. But where will he put in? At Tabor Island, not Lincoln Island."

"That is all the more certain," replied Harbert, "since Lincoln Island is not even marked on the map."

"So, my friends," the engineer continued, "we must take the necessary precautions to ensure that our presence and Ayrton's presence on

Lincoln Island is reported to Tabor Island."

"Obviously," replied the reporter, "and nothing is easier than to leave, in this cabin which was the home of Captain Grant and Ayrton, a notice giving the situation of our island, a notice which Lord Glenarvan or his crew will not fail to find."

"It is even unfortunate," the sailor observed, "that we forgot to take this precaution during our first voyage to Tabor Island."

"And why would we have taken it?" replied Harbert. "We didn't know Ayrton's story at that time; we didn't know that he would ever be sought out, and when we learned of this story, the season was too far advanced for us to return to Tabor Island."

— Yes, replied Cyrus Smith, it was too late, and we must postpone this crossing until next spring.

"But what if the Scottish yacht came from here?" said Pencroff.

"That's unlikely," replied the engineer, "for Lord Glenarwan would not choose the winter season to venture into those distant seas. Either he has already returned to Tabor Island since Ayrton has been with us, that is to say, for five months, and has left again, or he will only come later, and it will be time, as soon as the first fine days of October arrive, to go to Tabor Island and leave a notice."

"It must be admitted," said Nab, "that it would be very unfortunate if the Duncan had reappeared in these seas only a few months ago!"

"I hope that's not the case," replied Cyrus Smith, "and that heaven has not taken away our best chance!"

— I believe, observed the reporter, that in any case we will know where we stand when we return to Tabor Island, because if the Scots have returned there, they will necessarily have left some traces of their passage.

"That's obvious," replied the engineer. "So then, my friends, since we have this chance of repatriation, let us wait patiently, and if it is taken away from us, we will see then what we must do."

"In any case," said Pencroff, "it is understood that if we leave Lincoln Island in one way or another, it will not be because we are unhappy there!"

"No, Pencroff," replied the engineer, "it will be because we are far from everything a man should cherish most in the world: his family, his friends, his native country!"

With things thus decided, there was no longer any question of undertaking the construction of a ship large enough to venture either to the archipelagos in the north or to New Zealand in the west, and only

the usual work in preparation for a third wintering at Granite House was undertaken.

However, it was also decided that the longboat would be used, before the bad weather arrived, to make a trip around the island. The complete reconnaissance of the coasts was not yet finished, and the colonists had only an imperfect idea of the coastline to the west and north, from the mouth of the river of the waterfall to the mandible capes, nor of the narrow bay that cut between them like a shark's jaw.

The plan for this excursion was put forward by Pencroff, and Cyrus Smith gave it his full support, because he wanted to see for himself all this part of his estate.

The weather was variable then, but the barometer did not oscillate in sudden movements, and one could therefore count on manageable weather.

Specifically, during the first week of April, after a sharp drop in barometric pressure, the resumption of the rise was signaled by a strong westerly wind that lasted five to six days; then, the needle of the instrument became stationary again at a height of twenty-nine and nine-tenths inches (759.45 mm), and the circumstances appeared favorable for exploration.

The day of departure was set for April 16, and the Bonadventure, anchored in the balloon port, was provisioned for a voyage that could last some time.

Cyrus Smith informed Ayrton of the planned expedition and offered him a place on it; but, as Ayrton preferred to remain ashore, it was decided that he would come to Granite House during his companions' absence. Master Jup was to keep him company and made no complaint.

On the morning of April 16th, all the colonists, accompanied by Top, were aboard. The wind was blowing from the southwest, a fine breeze, and the Bonadventure had to tack as it left the harbor to reach Reptile Point. Of the ninety miles that made up the island's perimeter, the south coast measured about twenty miles from the harbor to the promontory. Therefore, it was necessary to cover those twenty miles as close as possible, because the wind was absolutely head-on.

It took no less than the entire day to reach the headland, for the boat, upon leaving the port, encountered only two hours of ebb tide and, conversely, six hours of flood tide, which proved very difficult to manage. Night had therefore fallen when the headland was rounded.

Pencroff then suggested to the engineer that they continue at slow speed, with two reefs in their sails. But Cyrus Smith preferred to anchor a few cables' lengths from land, in order to revisit that part of the coast

during the day. It was even agreed that, since this was a thorough exploration of the island's coastline, they would not sail at night, and that, as evening fell, they would drop anchor close to shore, weather permitting.

The night was spent at anchor beneath the headland, and as the wind died down with the fog, the silence was no longer disturbed. The passengers, with the exception of the sailor, perhaps slept a little less soundly aboard the Bonadventure than they would have in their rooms at Granite House, but at least they slept.

The following day, April 17, Pencroff set sail at daybreak, and, on a broad reach and port tack, was able to sail very close to the western coast.

The settlers were familiar with this magnificent wooded coast, having already walked along its edge, and yet it still aroused their admiration. They stayed as close to the land as possible, moderating their speed so as to observe everything, taking care only to avoid hitting the occasional tree trunk floating here and there.

Several times they even dropped anchor, and Gideon Spilett took photographic views of this superb coastline.

Around noon, the Bonadventure reached the mouth of the river at the falls. Beyond, on the right bank, trees reappeared, but more sparsely,

and three miles further on, they formed only isolated clumps between the western foothills of the mountain, whose arid ridge stretched all the way to the coast. What a contrast between the southern and northern portions of this coast! As wooded and verdant as the former was, the latter was harsh and wild! It resembled one of those "iron coasts," as they are called in some countries, and its tormented texture seemed to indicate that a veritable crystallization had suddenly occurred in the still-molten basalt of geological eras. A terrifying jumble of rocks, which would have terrified the colonists at first sight, had chance cast them upon this part of the island! When they were at the top of Mount Franklin, they could not recognize the profoundly sinister aspect of this shoreline, because they overlooked it from too high; but, seen from the sea, this coastline presented itself with a character of strangeness, the equivalent of which was perhaps not found in any corner of the world.

The Bonadventure sailed past this coast, extending it for half a mile. It was easy to see that it was composed of blocks of all sizes, from twenty feet to three hundred feet high, and of all shapes: cylindrical like towers, prismatic like steeples, pyramidal like obelisks, conical like factory chimneys. An ice floe in the Arctic Ocean could not have been more capriciously arranged in its sublime horror! Here, bridges were thrown from one rock to another; there, arches were arranged like

those of a ship, whose depths could not be discerned; in one place, wide excavations, whose vaults presented a monumental aspect; in another, a veritable jumble of points, pyramidions, and spires such as no Gothic cathedral has ever seen. All the whims of nature, even more varied than those of the imagination, shaped this magnificent coastline, which stretched for a length of eight to nine miles.

Cyrus Smith and his companions watched with a sense of surprise that bordered on astonishment.

But while they remained silent, Top didn't hesitate to bark, the sounds echoing off the basalt wall a thousand times. The engineer even observed that these barks had something strange about them, like the barks the dog made at the wellhead of Granite-House.

"Let's come alongside," he said.

And the Bonadventure came skimming as close as possible to the shoreline rocks. Perhaps there was some cave there worth exploring? But Cyrus Smith saw nothing, not a cavern, not a crevice that could serve as a refuge for any creature, for the base of the rocks was bathed in the very surf of the waters. Soon Top's barking ceased, and the boat resumed its course a few cables' lengths from the shore.

In the northwestern part of the island, the shore became flat and sandy again. A few rare trees stood out above a low and marshy land,

which the settlers had already glimpsed, and, in stark contrast to the other, so deserted coast, life was manifested by the presence of myriads of water birds.

In the evening, the Bonadventure anchored in a slight indentation of the coastline, north of the island, close to land, as the waters were so deep in that place.

The night passed peacefully, for the breeze died away, so to speak, with the last gleams of day, and it did not resume until the first hints of dawn.

As it was easy to land that morning, the colony's designated hunters, namely Harbert and Gideon Spilett, went for a two-hour walk and returned with several strings of ducks and snipe.

Top had done a marvelous job, and not a single game animal had been lost, thanks to his zeal and skill.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the Bonadventure set sail and sped very quickly up towards Cape Mandible-North, because it had a tailwind, and the breeze was tending to freshen.

“Besides,” said Pencroff, “I wouldn’t be surprised if a westerly gale were brewing. Yesterday, the sun set on a very red horizon, and this morning we have these ‘cat’s tails’ which don’t bode well.”

These cattails were wispy cirrus clouds, scattered at the zenith, and whose height never fell below five thousand feet above sea level. They resembled light pieces of cotton wool, whose presence usually foretells some impending disturbance in the elements.

"Well," said Cyrus Smith, "let's take as much canvas as we can carry, and seek refuge in Shark Bay. I think the Bonadventure will be safe there."

"Perfectly," replied Pencroff, "and besides, the north coast is made up of dunes that are not very interesting to consider."

"I wouldn't mind," added the engineer, "spending not only the night, but also tomorrow in this bay, which deserves to be explored carefully."

“I think we’ll be forced to do it, whether we like it or not,” replied Pencroff, “because the horizon is starting to look threatening in the western part. Look how it’s getting murky!”

"In any case, we have good winds to reach Cape Mandible," the reporter observed.

"Very good wind," replied the sailor; "but to enter the gulf, we will have to tack, and I would quite like to see clearly in these parts which I do not know!"

"These are areas which must be fraught with perils," added Harbert, "if we judge by what we have seen on the southern coast of Shark Gulf."

— Pencroff, said Cyrus Smith then, do your best, we leave it up to you.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Cyrus,” replied the sailor, “I won’t expose myself unnecessarily! I’d rather have a knife wound in my hull than a rock strike my Bonadventure!”

What Pencroff called the living works was the submerged part of the hull of his boat, and he valued it more than his own skin!

"What time is it?" asked Pencroff.

"Ten o'clock," replied Gideon Spilett.

— And how far do we have to go to the cape, Mr. Cyrus?

"About fifteen miles," replied the engineer.

"It will take two and a half hours," said the sailor, "and we will be abeam of the cape between noon and one o'clock. Unfortunately, the tide will turn at that time, and the ebb tide will be leaving the gulf. I fear, therefore, that it will be difficult to enter, with the wind and sea against us."

"Especially since it's a full moon today," Harbert observed, "and these April tides are very strong."

"Well, Pencroff," asked Cyrus Smith, "can't you anchor at the tip of the cape?"

"Anchoring close to shore, with bad weather in the forecast!" cried the sailor. "Do you think you can do that, Mr. Cyrus? That would be like deliberately running aground!"

— So, what will you do?

— I will try to stay out at sea until the tide comes in, that is to say until seven o'clock in the evening, and if it is still a little light, I will try to enter the gulf; otherwise, we will stay running from side to side all night, and we will enter tomorrow at sunrise.

"I told you, Pencroff, we're leaving it up to you," replied Cyrus Smith.

"Ah!" said Pencroff, "if there were only one lighthouse on this coast, it would be more convenient for sailors!"

"Yes," replied Harbert, "and this time we won't have a compliant engineer lighting a fire to guide us to port!"

"Oh, by the way, my dear Cyrus," said Gideon Spilett, "we never thanked you; but frankly, without that fire, we would never have been able to reach..."

"A fire...?" asked Cyrus Smith, very surprised by the reporter's words.

"We mean to say, Mr. Cyrus," replied Pencroff, "that we were very embarrassed on board the Bonadventure during the last hours before our return, and that we would have passed downwind of the island, if not for the precaution you took of lighting a fire on the night of October 19-20 on the plateau of Granite House."

— Yes, yes!... that was a brilliant idea I had there! replied the engineer.

"And this time," added the sailor, "unless the thought occurs to Ayrton, there will be no one to do us this small favor!"

"No! Nobody!" replied Cyrus Smith.

And a few moments later, finding himself alone at the front of the boat with the reporter, the engineer leaned close to his ear and said:

"If there is one thing certain in this world, Spilett, it is that I never lit a fire on the night of October 19th to 20th, neither on the Granite-House plateau, nor anywhere else on the island!"

CHAPTER XX

Things unfolded exactly as Pencroff had foreseen, for his premonitions could not be mistaken. The wind freshened, and from a gentle breeze, it became a gale, that is to say, it reached a speed of forty to forty-five miles per hour, a speed at which a ship in open water would have been under full reefing, with its topgallant sails set. Now, as it was about six o'clock when the Bonadventure was abeam of the gulf, and the ebb tide was at that moment, it was impossible to enter. He was therefore forced to keep to the open sea, for even if he had wished to, Pencroff could not have reached the mouth of the Mercy. So, after hoisting his jib on the mainmast as a storm jib, he waited, heading towards land.

Fortunately, although the wind was very strong, the sea, sheltered by the coast, did not become extremely rough. Therefore, there was no need to fear the pounding of waves, which are a great danger to small boats.

The Bonadventure would not have capsized, no doubt, for it was well ballasted; but enormous waves of water falling on board could have compromised it if the hatches had not held. Pencroff, a skilled sailor,

prepared for every eventuality. Indeed! He had complete confidence in his vessel, but he nonetheless awaited daylight with a certain anxiety.

During that night, Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett had no opportunity to speak together, and yet the phrase whispered in the reporter's ear by the engineer was worth discussing once again this mysterious influence that seemed to reign over Lincoln Island. Gideon Spilett couldn't stop thinking about this new and inexplicable incident, this appearance of a fire on the island's shore. He had truly seen this fire! His companions, Harbert and Pencroff, had seen it too! This fire had helped them to reconnoiter the island's position during that dark night, and they couldn't doubt that it had been the engineer's hand that had lit it, and now Cyrus Smith was declaring categorically that he had done no such thing!

Gideon Spilett vowed to revisit the incident as soon as the Bonadventure returned and to urge Cyrus Smith to inform his companions of these strange events. Perhaps then they would decide to conduct a joint, thorough investigation of all parts of Lincoln Island.

In any case, that night no fire was lit on those shores, still unknown, which formed the entrance to the gulf, and the small boat continued to stay offshore throughout the night.

When the first glimmers of dawn appeared on the eastern horizon, the wind, which had calmed slightly, shifted two-quarters of the way, allowing Pencroff to more easily enter the narrow entrance to the gulf. Around seven o'clock in the morning, the Bonadventure, after drifting along the northern cape, cautiously entered the channel and ventured onto these waters, enclosed within the strangest setting of lava.

"There," said Pencroff, "is a stretch of sea that would make an admirable roadstead, where fleets could maneuver at their ease!"

“What is most curious,” observed Cyrus Smith, “is that this gulf was formed by two lava flows, spewed out by the volcano, which accumulated through successive eruptions. As a result, this gulf is completely sheltered on all sides, and it is likely that, even in the worst winds, the sea there is as calm as a lake.”

“No doubt,” replied the sailor, “since the wind has only this narrow channel between the two capes to enter, and even then the northern cape covers the southern one, making it very difficult for gusts to get in. In truth, our Bonadventure could remain there from one end of the year to the other without even needing to tighten its anchors!”

"It's a bit big for him!" the reporter remarked.

"Hey, Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor, "I agree that it's too big for the Bonadventure, but if the Union fleets need a safe haven in the Pacific, I

believe they will never find better than this roadstead!"

"We are in the jaws of the shark," Nab then observed, alluding to the shape of the gulf.

"Right in the face, my good Nab!" replied Harbert, "but you're not afraid it will close on us, are you?"

"No, Mr. Harbert," replied Nab, "and yet I don't much like that gulf! It has a nasty face!"

"Well!" cried Pencroff, "there's Nab disparaging my gulf, just when I'm thinking of paying homage to America for it!"

"But at least the waters are deep?" asked the engineer, "because what is sufficient for the keel of the Bonadventure would not be sufficient for that of our ironclad ships."

"Easy to verify," replied Pencroff.

And the sailor lowered a long rope to the bottom, which served as his sounding line, and to which was attached an iron block. This line measured about fifty fathoms, and it unspooled to the end without hitting the ground.

"Come on," said Pencroff, "our ships can come here! They won't fail!"

— Indeed, said Cyrus Smith, this gulf is a veritable abyss; but, taking into account the plutonian origin of the island, it is not surprising that

the seabed offers such depressions.

"It also looks as if," Harbert observed, "these walls have been cut straight across, and I believe that at their base, even with a probe five or six times longer, Pencroff would not find a bottom."

"All this is well and good," said the reporter, "but I would point out to Pencroff that his harbor is missing one important thing!"

— And which one, Mr. Spilett?

"A cutting, some kind of trench, that gives access to the interior of the island. I don't see a single point where we could gain a foothold!"

And indeed, the high, steep lava flows offered not a single suitable landing place along the entire perimeter of the gulf. It was an impassable barrier, reminiscent of the Norwegian fjords, but even more arid. The Bonadventure, skimming these high walls almost touching them, couldn't find even a promontory that would allow the passengers to leave the ship.

Pencroff consoled himself by saying that, with the help of the mine, they would know how to breach this wall when necessary, and since, decidedly, there was nothing to be done in this gulf, he directed his boat towards the channel and left around two o'clock in the evening.

"Phew!" said Nab, letting out a sigh of satisfaction.

It really looked as if the brave black man didn't feel comfortable in that enormous jaw!

From Cape Mandible to the mouth of the Mercy, it was barely eight miles. So they set a course for Granite House, and the Bonadventure, with a broad reach, extended the coastline a mile further out. The enormous lava rocks soon gave way to those capricious dunes, among which the engineer had been so remarkably found, and which were frequented by hundreds of seabirds.

At about four o'clock, Pencroff, leaving the tip of the islet on its left, entered the channel that separated it from the coast, and, at five o'clock, the anchor of the Bonadventure bit the sandy bottom at the mouth of the Mercy.

The colonists had left their home three days ago. Ayrton was waiting for them on the shore, and Master Jup came cheerfully to meet them, letting out good grunts of satisfaction.

The entire coastline of the island had therefore been explored, and no suspicious traces had been observed.

If any mysterious being resided there, it could only be under the cover of the impenetrable woods of the serpentine peninsula, where the colonists had not yet carried out their investigations.

Gideon Spilett discussed these matters with the engineer, and it was agreed that they would draw their companions' attention to the strange nature of certain incidents that had occurred on the island, the last of which was one of the most inexplicable. Thus, Cyrus Smith, returning to the subject of a fire lit by an unknown hand on the shore, could not help but repeat to the reporter for the twentieth time:

"But are you sure you saw it correctly? Wasn't it a partial eruption of the volcano, some kind of meteor?"

“No, Cyrus,” replied the reporter, “it was certainly a man-made fire. Besides, question Pencroff and Harbert. They saw it as I did myself, and they will confirm my words.”

It followed, therefore, that a few days later, on April 25th, during the evening, when all the colonists were gathered on the plateau of Grande-vue, Cyrus Smith spoke, saying:

"My friends, I feel I must draw your attention to certain events that have occurred on the island, and on which I would be very glad to have your opinion. These events are, so to speak, supernatural..."

"Supernatural!" cried the sailor, exhaling a puff of tobacco. "Could it be that our island is supernatural?"

"No, Pencroff, but mysterious, for sure," replied the engineer, "unless you can explain to us what Spilett and I have been unable to understand

until now."

"Speak, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor.

— Well! Do you understand, said the engineer then, how it was that after falling into the sea, I was found a quarter of a mile inside the island, and this without my being aware of this movement?

— Unless, having fainted… said Pencroff.

"That's unacceptable," replied the engineer. "But let's move on. Do you understand how Top was able to discover your retreat, five miles from the cave where I was lying?"

"The dog's instinct..." replied Harbert.

"Singular instinct!" observed the reporter, "since, despite the rain and wind that raged during that night, Top arrived at the chimneys dry and without a speck of mud!"

"Let's move on," the engineer continued. "Did you understand how our dog was so strangely thrown out of the lake after its struggle with the dugong?"

"No! Not really, I admit," replied Pencroff, "and the wound that the dugong had on its flank, a wound that seemed to have been made by a sharp instrument, is no more understandable."

“Let’s move on,” Cyrus Smith continued. “Have you understood, my friends, how that grain of lead came to be in the young peccary’s body, how that crate washed ashore so fortunately, without any trace of a shipwreck, how that bottle containing the document appeared so opportunely during our first sea excursion, how our canoe, having broken its mooring, came with the current of the Mercy to join us precisely when we needed it, how, after the monkey invasion, the ladder was so opportunely retrieved from the heights of Granite House, and how, finally, the document that Ayrton claims never to have written fell into our hands?”

Cyrus Smith had just listed, without omitting a single one, the strange events that had taken place on the island. Harbert, Pencroff, and Nab looked at each other, unsure how to respond, for the succession of these incidents, grouped together for the first time, had astonished them to the highest degree.

"Upon my word," said Pencroff at last, "you are right, Mr. Cyrus, and it is difficult to explain these things!"

"Well, my friends," the engineer continued, "one last fact has been added to these, and it is no less incomprehensible than the others!"

"Which one, Mr. Cyrus?" Harbert asked sharply.

"When you returned from Tabor Island, Pencroff," the engineer continued, "you said that a fire appeared to you on Lincoln Island?"

"Certainly," replied the sailor.

— And you are quite certain you saw that fire?

— As I can see.

— You too, Harbert?

"Ah! Mr. Cyrus," cried Harbert, "that fire shone like a first-magnitude star!"

"But wasn't it a star?" the engineer asked insistently.

“No,” replied Pencroff, “because the sky was covered with heavy clouds, and a star, in any case, would not have been so low on the horizon. But Mr. Spilett saw it as we did, and he can confirm our words!”

— I would add, said the reporter, that this fire was very intense and that it projected something like an electric sheet.

— Yes! Yes! Perfectly... replied Harbert, and he was certainly positioned on the heights of Granite-House.

— Well, my friends, replied Cyrus Smith, during that night of October 19th to 20th, neither Nab nor I lit a fire on the coast.

"You don't have it?..." exclaimed Pencroff, in utter astonishment, and who could not even finish his sentence.

“We haven’t left Granite House,” replied Cyrus Smith, “and if a fire has appeared on the coast, it was lit by a hand other than ours!”

Pencroff, Harbert, and Nab were stunned. There had been no illusion, and a fire had truly struck their eyes during the night of October 19th to 20th!

Yes! They had to admit it, a mystery existed! An inexplicable influence, clearly beneficial to the colonists but quite irritating to their curiosity, was making itself felt, and conveniently so, on Lincoln Island. Was there some being hidden in its deepest recesses? That was what they absolutely had to know!

Cyrus Smith also reminded his companions of Top and Jup's peculiar behavior when they loitered near the well opening that connected Granite House to the sea, and told them that he had explored the well without finding anything suspicious. Finally, the conversation concluded with a resolution by all members of the colony to thoroughly search the island as soon as warmer weather returned.

But from that day on, Pencroff seemed to be worried.

This island, which he had made his personal property, it seemed to him that it no longer belonged entirely to him and that he shared it with

another master, to whom, willingly or unwillingly, he felt subject.

Nab and he often talked about these inexplicable things, and both, being very prone to the marvelous by their very nature, were not far from believing that Lincoln Island was subject to some supernatural power.

However, the bad weather arrived with May—November in the boreal zones. Winter looked set to be harsh and early. Therefore, winter preparations were undertaken without delay.

Moreover, the settlers were well prepared to face this winter, however harsh it might be. Felt clothing was plentiful, and the mouflon sheep, which were numerous at the time, had abundantly provided the wool necessary for making this warm fabric.

It goes without saying that Ayrton had been provided with these comfortable clothes. Cyrus Smith offered him the opportunity to spend the winter at Granite House, where he would be better accommodated than at the corral, and Ayrton promised to do so as soon as the final work on the corral was completed. This he did around mid-April. From then on, Ayrton shared in the common life and made himself useful on every occasion; but, always humble and melancholy, he never took part in the pleasures of his companions!

For most of that third winter the colonists spent on Lincoln Island, they remained confined to Granite House. There were very great storms and terrible gales, which seemed to shake the rocks to their very foundations. Immense tidal waves threatened to cover the island entirely, and certainly any ship anchored on the shores would have been lost with all hands. Twice, during one of these storms, the Mercy River swelled to such an extent that there was cause to fear the bridge and culverts would be swept away, and it was even necessary to reinforce those on the shore, which disappeared beneath the layers of water when the sea pounded the coastline.

It is widely believed that such gusts of wind, comparable to tornadoes, where rain and snow mingled, caused damage on the Grande-vue plateau. The mill and the farmyard suffered particularly badly. The settlers often had to make urgent repairs, otherwise the birds' survival would have been seriously threatened.

During these severe storms, a few pairs of jaguars and groups of quadrupeds ventured as far as the edge of the plateau, and there was always the fear that the most agile and daring, driven by hunger, might manage to cross the stream, which, moreover, when frozen, offered them easy passage. Plantations and livestock would have been infallibly destroyed then without constant vigilance, and often shots had to be

fired to keep these dangerous visitors at a respectful distance. Thus, the winterers had no shortage of work, for, besides the care of the outdoors, there were always a thousand maintenance tasks to be carried out at Granite House.

There were also some fine hunts, undertaken in the bitter cold of the vast shelduck marshes. Gideon Spilett and Harbert, assisted by Jup and Top, didn't miss a shot amidst the myriads of ducks, snipe, teal, pintails, and lapwings. Access to this game-rich territory was easy, whether one came by the road to the Balloon Harbour, after passing under the Mercy Bridge, or by rounding the rocks at the tip of the wreck, and the hunters never ventured more than two or three miles from Granite House.

Thus passed the four truly harsh winter months, namely June, July, August, and September. But, all in all, Granite House did not suffer too much from the inclement weather, and the same was true of the corral, which, being less exposed than the plateau and largely sheltered by Mount Franklin, received only the remnants of the windstorms already broken by the forests and high coastal rocks. The damage there was therefore minimal, and Ayrton's active and skillful hand was sufficient to repair it promptly when, in the second half of October, he returned to spend a few days at the corral.

During that winter, no new inexplicable incidents occurred. Nothing strange happened, although Pencroff and Nab were on the lookout for the most insignificant events they could attribute to a mysterious cause. Top and Jup themselves no longer prowled around the well and showed no sign of concern. It seemed, therefore, that the series of supernatural incidents had ended, although they were often discussed during the evening gatherings at Granite House, and it remained well understood that the island would be searched even in its most difficult-to-explore parts. But an event of the utmost gravity, and with potentially disastrous consequences, momentarily diverted Cyrus Smith and his companions from their plans.

It was October. The beautiful season was fast approaching. Nature was renewing itself under the sun's rays, and, amidst the evergreen foliage of the conifers that formed the edge of the woods, the new foliage of the hackberry trees, banksias and deodars was already appearing.

We recall that Gideon Spilett and Harbert had taken photographic views of Lincoln Island on several occasions.

Now, on the 17th of this month of October, around three o'clock in the evening, Harbert, seduced by the purity of the sky, had the idea of

reproducing the whole bay of union which faced the plateau of Grande-vue, from the cape mandibule to the cape griffe.

The horizon was admirably drawn, and the sea, undulating under a soft breeze, presented in its background the stillness of the waters of a lake, dotted here and there with luminous flecks.

The lens had been placed in one of the windows of the great hall of Granite House, and consequently, it overlooked the shore and the bay. Harbert proceeded as he usually did, and, having obtained the photograph, he went to fix it using the substances that were stored in a dark alcove of Granite House.

Back in full light, upon closer examination, Harbert noticed on his photograph a small, almost imperceptible dot that marred the sea horizon.

He tried to make it disappear by repeated washing, but he could not succeed.

"It's a defect that's in the glass," he thought.

And then he became curious to examine this defect with a strong lens which he unscrewed from one of the glasses.

But no sooner had he looked than he let out a cry and the photo almost slipped from his hands.

Running immediately to the room where Cyrus Smith was standing, he handed the photograph and lens to the engineer, pointing out the small spot.

Cyrus Smith examined this point; then, seizing his spyglass, he rushed to the window.

The spyglass, after slowly scanning the horizon, finally stopped on the suspicious spot, and Cyrus Smith, lowering it, uttered only this word: "ship!"

And indeed, a ship was in sight of Lincoln Island!

PART 3

THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

For two and a half years, the balloon survivors had been cast ashore on Lincoln Island, and until then, no communication had been established between them and their fellow humans. Once, the reporter had attempted to contact the inhabited world by entrusting a bird with a notice containing the secret of their predicament, but this was a chance that could not be relied upon seriously. Only Ayrton, and under the circumstances we know, had joined the members of the small colony. And now, on this very day—October 17th—other men unexpectedly appeared within sight of the island, on this still-deserted sea!

There was no longer any doubt! A ship was there!

But would it pass by, or would it put out? Within a few hours, the colonists would obviously know what to expect.

Cyrus Smith and Harbert, having immediately summoned Gideon Spilett, Pencroff, and Nab to the great hall of Granite House, informed them of what was happening. Pencroff, seizing the spyglass, quickly scanned the horizon, and, stopping on the indicated point, that is to say, on the one that had made the imperceptible mark of the photograph:

"Bless you! It's definitely a ship!" he said in a voice that did not betray extraordinary satisfaction.

"Is he coming to us?" asked Gideon Spilett.

"It's impossible to say anything for certain yet," replied Pencroff, "because only its mast appears above the horizon, and not a piece of its hull is visible!"

"What should we do?" said the young boy.

"Wait," replied Cyrus Smith.

And for quite some time the colonists remained silent, given over to all the thoughts, all the emotions, all the fears, all the hopes that this incident could give rise to in them — the most serious that had occurred since their arrival on Lincoln Island.

Certainly, the colonists were not in the situation of those shipwrecked sailors abandoned on a barren islet, struggling for their miserable existence against a cruel nature and constantly consumed by the

longing to see inhabited lands again. Pencroff and Nab especially, who were both so happy and so wealthy, would not have left their island without regret. They were, moreover, well-suited to this new life, in the midst of this realm that their intelligence had, so to speak, civilized! But still, this ship, in any case, represented news from the mainland; it was perhaps a piece of their homeland coming to meet them! It carried people like themselves, and one can understand why their hearts would have leapt at its sight! From time to time, Pencroff would take up the spyglass again and position himself at the window. From there, he examined the vessel, which was twenty miles to the east, with extreme attention. The colonists therefore had no means of signaling their presence. A flag would not have been seen; a detonation would not have been heard; a fire would not have been visible.

However, it was certain that the island, dominated by Mount Franklin, could not have escaped the notice of the ship's lookouts. But why would this vessel land there? Wasn't it simply chance that brought it to this part of the Pacific, where the maps showed no land except for Tabor Island, which itself lay outside the routes usually followed by long-haul ships from the Polynesian archipelagos, New Zealand, and the American coast?

To this question that everyone was asking themselves, an answer was suddenly given by Harbert.

"Could that be Duncan?" he exclaimed.

The Duncan, no one has forgotten, was Lord Glenarvan's yacht, the one that had abandoned Ayrton on the islet and was planning to return for him one day. Now, the islet wasn't so far from Lincoln Island that a vessel bound for one couldn't possibly pass within sight of the other. They were only 150 miles apart in longitude and 75 miles in latitude.

"We must inform Ayrton," said Gideon Spilett, "and summon him immediately. He alone can tell us if this is the Duncan."

This was everyone's opinion, and the reporter, going to the telegraph apparatus that connected the corral and Granite-House, sent this telegram: "Come with all haste."

A few moments later, the bell rang.

"I'm coming," Ayrton replied.

Then the colonists continued to observe the ship.

"If it's the Duncan," said Harbert, "Ayrton will recognize it without difficulty, since he sailed on board it for some time."

"And if he recognizes it," added Pencroff, "it will give him a great thrill!"

"Yes," replied Cyrus Smith, "but now Ayrton is worthy to return to the Duncan, and heaven forbid that it is indeed Lord Glenarvan's yacht, for any other vessel would seem suspicious to me! These seas are treacherous, and I always fear for our island the visit of some Malay pirates."

"We would defend her!" cried Harbert.

"No doubt, my child," replied the engineer, smiling, "but it's better not to have to defend her."

"A simple observation," said Gideon Spilett. "Lincoln Island is unknown to navigators, since it doesn't even appear on the most recent maps. Don't you think, Cyrus, that this is reason enough for a ship, unexpectedly sighting this new land, to seek to visit it rather than flee from it?"

"Indeed," replied Pencroff.

"I think so too," added the engineer. "One can even say that it is a captain's duty to report, and therefore to come and explore, any land or island not yet catalogued, and Lincoln Island is one of those places."

"Well," said Pencroff then, "let's say that ship lands, that it anchors there, a few cables' lengths from our island, what will we do?"

This question, posed abruptly, initially went unanswered. But Cyrus Smith, after reflecting, replied in his usual calm tone:

"What we will do, my friends, what we must do, is this: we will communicate with the ship, we will take passage on board, and we will leave our island, having taken possession of it in the name of the states of the Union. Then, we will return with all those who wish to follow us to colonize it permanently and provide the American republic with a useful station in this part of the Pacific Ocean!"

"Hurrah!" cried Pencroff, "and this will be no small gift we are giving our country! The colonization is almost complete, names have been given to all parts of the island, there is a natural harbor, a watering place, roads, a telegraph line, a shipyard, a factory, and all that remains is to put Lincoln Island on the maps!"

"But what if it gets taken from us while we're away?" Gideon Spilett pointed out.

"A thousand devils!" cried the sailor, "I'd rather stay here alone to guard it, and, by Pencroff's word, no one would steal it from me like a watch from some gawker's pocket!"

For an hour, it was impossible to say with certainty whether the reported vessel was or was not heading for Lincoln Island. It had approached, however, but on what course was it sailing? This is what

Pencroff could not ascertain. However, since the wind was blowing from the northeast, it was reasonable to assume that the ship was sailing on a starboard tack. Moreover, the breeze was favorable for pushing it onto the island's shores, and, in this calm sea, it could not be feared approaching, although its soundings were not recorded on the chart.

Around four o'clock—an hour after he had been summoned—Ayrton arrived at Granite House. He entered the great hall, saying:

"At your service, gentlemen."

Cyrus Smith extended his hand to him, as was his custom, and led him to the window:

"Ayrton," he told him, "we asked you to come for a serious reason. A building is in sight of the island."

Ayrton first paled slightly, and his eyes blurred for a moment. Then, leaning out of the window, he scanned the horizon, but he saw nothing.

"Take this spyglass," said Gideon Spilett, "and look closely, Ayrton, for it is possible that this ship was the Duncan, which came to these seas to bring you home."

"The Duncan!" Ayrton murmured. "Already!"

The last word escaped Ayrton's lips almost involuntarily, and he let his head fall into his hands.

Twelve years of abandonment on a deserted islet did not seem to him sufficient expiation? Did the repentant culprit not yet feel forgiven, either in his own eyes or in the eyes of others?

"No," he said, "no! It can't be Duncan."

"Look, Ayrton," the engineer said then, "because it's important that we know in advance what to expect."

Ayrton took the telescope and pointed it in the indicated direction. For a few minutes, he observed the horizon without moving, without uttering a single word. Then:

"Indeed, it is a ship," he said, "but I don't believe it's the Duncan."

"Why couldn't it be him?" asked Gideon Spilett.

— Because the Duncan is a steam yacht, and I see no trace of smoke, either above or near this vessel.

"Perhaps he is only sailing?" observed Pencroff. "The wind is favorable for the route he seems to be following, and he must be careful to conserve his coal, being so far from any land."

“It’s possible you’re right, Mr. Pencroff,” replied Ayrton, “and that the ship has extinguished its lights. Let’s allow it to reach the shore, then,

and we'll soon know what to make of it."

That said, Ayrton went and sat down in a corner of the great hall and remained silent. The colonists continued discussing the unknown ship, but without Ayrton joining the conversation.

They were all in a state of mind that would have prevented them from continuing their work. Gideon Spilett and Pencroff were particularly nervous, pacing back and forth, unable to stay still. Harbert was more curious. Nab alone maintained his usual calm.

Was not his country where his master was?

As for the engineer, he remained absorbed in his thoughts, and, deep down, he dreaded rather than desired the arrival of this ship.

However, the vessel had come a little closer to the island. With the help of a spyglass, it was possible to determine that it was a long-haul ship, and not one of those Malay proas usually used by Pacific pirates. It was therefore reasonable to believe that the engineer's apprehensions were unfounded, and that the presence of this vessel in the waters off Lincoln Island posed no danger to it. Pencroff, after careful observation, felt he could confirm that the ship was rigged as a brig and was sailing obliquely to the coast, on a starboard tack, under its lower sails, topsails, and topgallant sails. This was confirmed by Ayrton.

But, continuing at this pace, it would soon disappear behind the tip of Cape Griffe, as it was heading southwest, and to observe it, it would then be necessary to reach the heights overlooking Washington Bay, near Port Ballon. An unfortunate circumstance, as it was already five o'clock in the evening, and twilight would soon make any observation very difficult.

"What will we do when night falls?" asked Gideon Spilett. "Will we light a fire to signal our presence on this coast?"

This was a serious question, and yet, whatever premonitions the engineer might have harbored, it was answered in the affirmative. During the night, the ship could disappear, sail away forever, and, once this ship was gone, would another return to the waters of Lincoln Island? Now, who could foresee what the future held for the colonists?

“Yes,” said the reporter, “we must let this building, whatever it may be, know that the island is inhabited. To neglect this opportunity would be to create future regrets!”

It was therefore decided that Nab and Pencroff would go to Port-Ballon, and that there, once night had fallen, they would light a large fire whose brightness would necessarily attract the attention of the brig's crew.

But just as Nab and the sailor were preparing to leave Granite House, the ship changed course and set a steady course towards the island, heading for Union Bay. That brig was a good sailer, for it approached quickly.

Nab and Pencroff then suspended their departure, and the telescope was placed in Ayrton's hands so that he could definitively determine whether or not the ship was the Duncan. The Scottish yacht was also rigged as a brig. The question, therefore, was whether a funnel rose between the two masts of the observed vessel, which was now only ten miles away.

The horizon was still very clear. The check was easy, and Ayrton soon lowered his telescope, saying:

"It's not Duncan! It couldn't be him!..."

Pencroff again framed the brig in the field of view of the spyglass, and he recognized that this brig, of three to four hundred tons, marvelously sleek, boldly rigged, admirably built for speed, must be a swift racer of the seas. But to which nation did it belong? That was difficult to say.

"And yet," added the sailor, "a flag flies from its horn, but I cannot make out its colours.

"Before half an hour, we will know for sure," replied the reporter. "Besides, it is quite clear that the captain of this ship intends to land,

and therefore, if not today, tomorrow at the latest, we will meet him."

"Nonsense!" said Pencroff. "It's better to know who you're dealing with, and I wouldn't mind recognizing this fellow's true colors!"

And, while speaking like this, the sailor did not take his eyes off his telescope.

The day was beginning to wane, and with it, the offshore wind was also dying down. The brig's flag, less taut, was getting tangled in the halyards, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to spot.

"This is not an American flag," Pencroff would say from time to time, "nor an English one, whose red would be easily visible, nor the French or German colors, nor the white flag of Russia, nor the yellow of Spain... it looks as if it were a uniform color... let's see... in these seas... what would we find more commonly?... the Chilean flag? But it is tricolor... Brazilian? It is green... Japanese? It is black and yellow... whereas this one..."

At that moment, a breeze raised the unknown flag.

Ayrton, seizing the telescope that the sailor had dropped, applied it to his eye, and, in a muffled voice:

"The black flag!" he cried.

Indeed, a dark streak was developing at the brig's gaff, and it was now rightly considered a suspicious vessel!

Was the engineer right in his premonitions? Was it a pirate ship? Was it scouring these shallow Pacific waters, competing with the Malay praos that still infest them? What was it looking for on the shores of Lincoln Island? Did it see it as an unknown, uncharted land, ripe for becoming a haven for stolen cargo? Was it seeking a port of refuge for the winter months? Was the honest domain of the settlers destined to become an infamous haven—a kind of capital of Pacific piracy?

All these ideas instinctively came to the colonists' minds. There was no doubt, moreover, about the significance to be attached to the color of the flag being flown. It was indeed the flag of the sea rovers! It was the one the Duncan would have flown, had the convicts succeeded in their criminal plans!

We didn't waste any time discussing it.

“My friends,” said Cyrus Smith, “perhaps this ship only wants to observe the island’s coastline? Perhaps its crew won’t even disembark? That’s fortunate. In any case, we must do everything we can to conceal our presence here. The windmill, perched on the plateau of Grande-vue, is too easily recognizable. Let Ayrton and Nab go and take down its sails. Let’s also hide the windows of Granite-House under thicker

branches. Let all fires be extinguished. Let nothing, in short, betray the presence of man on this island!”

"And our boat?" said Harbert.

“Oh!” replied Pencroff, “she’s sheltered in Port-Ballon, and I defy those wretches to find her there!”

The engineer's orders were immediately carried out. Nab and Ayrton went up onto the plateau and took the necessary steps to conceal any sign of habitation. While they attended to this task, their companions went to the edge of the jacamar forest and brought back a large quantity of branches and vines, which, from a distance, would create a natural canopy and effectively conceal the openings in the granite wall. At the same time, ammunition and weapons were positioned so that they could be used at a moment's notice in the event of a surprise attack.

When all these precautions had been taken:

"My friends," said Cyrus Smith, — and one could sense in his voice that he was moved, — if these wretches want to seize Lincoln Island, we will defend it, won't we?

"Yes, Cyrus," replied the reporter, "and if necessary, we will all die to defend her!"

The engineer extended his hand to his companions, who shook it warmly.

Ayrton alone, remaining in his corner, had not joined the settlers. Perhaps he, the former convict, still felt unworthy!

Cyrus Smith understood what was happening in Ayrton's soul, and, going to him:

"And you, Ayrton," he asked him, "what will you do?"

"My duty," replied Ayrton.

Then he went and stood near the window and peered through the foliage.

It was half past seven. The sun had disappeared about twenty minutes earlier, behind Granite House. Consequently, the eastern horizon was gradually darkening. However, the brig was still advancing towards Union Bay. It was no more than eight miles out at that point, and precisely abeam of the Grande Vue shoal, for, having tacked at Cape Griffon, it had made considerable progress to the north, aided by the incoming tide. One might even say that, at that distance, it had already entered the vast bay, for a straight line, drawn from Cape Griffon to Cape Mandibule, remained to its west, on its starboard side.

Would the brig sink into the bay? That was the first question. Once in the bay, would it anchor there? That was the second.

Wouldn't he simply, after observing the coastline, put back out to sea without disembarking his crew? We would know within an hour. The colonists therefore had no choice but to wait.

Cyrus Smith had not seen the suspicious building displaying the black flag without deep anxiety.

Was this not a direct threat to the work that he and his companions had accomplished so far? Had the pirates—and there was no doubt that the sailors of this brig were pirates—already frequented this island, since they had raised their colors upon landing there?

Had they previously conducted some kind of raid there, which would have explained certain peculiarities that had remained inexplicable until then? Was there, in its unexplored sections, some accomplice ready to communicate with them?

To all these questions that he silently asked himself, Cyrus Smith did not know what to answer; but he felt that the situation of the colony could only be very seriously compromised by the arrival of this brig.

However, he and his companions were determined to resist to the bitter end. Were these pirates more numerous and better armed than the colonists?

That's what would have been really important to know!

But how do we get to them?

Night had fallen. The new moon, swept away by the sun's rays, had vanished. A profound darkness enveloped the island and the sea. The heavy clouds, piled high on the horizon, allowed no light to filter through. The wind had died down completely with the twilight. Not a leaf stirred on the trees, not a wave murmured on the shore. Nothing could be seen of the ship; all its lights were extinguished, and if it was still within sight of the island, its position was impossible to determine.

"Well, who knows?" said Pencroff. "Perhaps that damned ship will have sailed away during the night, and we won't find it again at daybreak?"

As if in response to the sailor's observation, a bright flash shot out to sea, and a cannon shot rang out.

The ship was still there, and there were pieces of artillery on board.

Six seconds had passed between the light and the shot.

So, the brig was about one and a quarter miles from the coast.

And at the same time, a sound of chains running and creaking through the hawseholes could be heard.

The ship had just anchored within sight of Granite-House!

CHAPTER II

There was no longer any doubt about the pirates' intentions. They had dropped anchor a short distance from the island, and it was clear that, the next day, using their canoes, they intended to reach the shore!

Cyrus Smith and his companions were ready to act, but, however resolute they were, they must not forget to be cautious. Perhaps their presence could still be concealed, in case the pirates were content to land on the shore without venturing inland. It was possible, in fact, that their only plan was to fill the Mercy's well, and it was not impossible that the bridge, built a mile and a half from the mouth, and the chimney fittings would escape their notice.

But why this tree-covered flag at the brig's gaff?

Why the cannon shot? Pure boasting, no doubt, unless it was a sign of taking possession! Cyrus Smith now knew that the ship was formidably armed. But what did the settlers of Lincoln Island have to answer the pirates' cannon? Just a few rifles.

“However,” observed Cyrus Smith, “we are in an impregnable situation here. The enemy cannot discover the spillway opening, now that it is hidden under the reeds and grasses, and, consequently, it is impossible for them to penetrate Granite-House.”

"But our crops, our poultry yard, our corral, everything, everything!" cried Pencroff, stamping his foot. "They can ravage everything, destroy everything in a few hours!"

"Everything, Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith, "and we have no way of stopping them."

"How many are there? That's the question," said the reporter. "If there are only a dozen, we'll be able to arrest them, but forty, fifty, perhaps more!"

"Mr. Smith," said Ayrton, stepping forward to the engineer, "will you grant me permission?"

— Which one, my friend!

— That of going to the ship to recognize the strength of its crew.

"But, Ayrton..." replied the engineer hesitantly, "you will be risking your life..."

— Why not, sir?

— That's more than your duty.

"I have more than my duty to do," replied Ayrton.

"Would you go with the dugout canoe to the building?" asked Gideon Spilett.

— No, sir, but I'll swim. The canoe wouldn't fit where a man can slip between two waters.

— Do you know that the brig is one and a quarter miles from the coast? said Harbert.

— I am a good swimmer, Mr. Harbert.

"It's risking your life, I tell you," the engineer continued.

"It doesn't matter," replied Ayrton. "Mr. Smith, I ask this as a favor. Perhaps it's a way for me to redeem myself in my own eyes!"

"Come on, Ayrton," replied the engineer, who sensed that a refusal would have deeply saddened the former convict, who had become an honest man again.

— I will accompany you, said Pencroff.

"You're defying me!" Ayrton replied sharply.

Then, more humbly:

"Alas!

— No! No! Cyrus Smith resumed animatedly, no, Ayrton! Pencroff does not distrust you! You have misinterpreted his words.

“Indeed,” replied the sailor, “I propose to Ayrton that I accompany him only as far as the islet. It’s possible, though unlikely, that one of those scoundrels has landed, and two men wouldn’t be too many in that case

to prevent him from raising the alarm. I'll wait for Ayrton on the islet, and he'll go to the ship alone, since he offered to do so."

With these arrangements made, Ayrton made his preparations for departure. His plan was audacious, but he could succeed, thanks to the darkness of night. Once he arrived at the building, Ayrton, clinging to either the bobstays or the chainplates of the shrouds, could ascertain their numbers and perhaps even discover the convicts' intentions.

Ayrton and Pencroff, followed by their companions, went down to the shore. Ayrton undressed and rubbed himself with grease, so as to suffer less from the temperature of the water, which was still cold.

It was possible, in fact, that he might be forced to remain there for several hours.

Pencroff and Nab, meanwhile, had gone to fetch the dugout canoe, moored a few hundred paces upstream on the bank of the Mercy, and when they returned, Ayrton was ready to leave. A blanket was thrown over Ayrton's shoulders, and the colonists came to shake his hand.

Ayrton embarked in the dugout canoe with Pencroff.

It was 10:30 PM when they both disappeared into the darkness. Their companions returned to wait for them at the chimneys.

The channel was easily crossed, and the canoe reached the opposite shore of the islet. This was done with some caution, in case pirates were prowling in the area. But, after observation, it seemed certain that the islet was deserted. So, Ayrton, followed by Pencroff, crossed it at a brisk pace, startling the birds nesting in the rock crevices; then, without hesitation, he plunged into the sea and swam silently in the direction of the ship, whose recently lit lights then indicated its exact position.

As for Pencroff, he huddled in a crevice in the shore and waited for his companion to return.

However, Ayrton swam with a strong arm and glided through the sheet of water without causing even the slightest ripple. His head barely broke the surface, and his eyes were fixed on the dark mass of the brig, whose lights were reflected in the sea.

He thought only of the duty he had promised to fulfill, and didn't even consider the dangers he faced, not only aboard the ship, but also in these waters frequented by sharks. The current carried him along, and he was quickly moving away from the shore. Half an hour later, Ayrton, unseen and unheard, slipped through the water, reached the ship, and grabbed onto the bowsprit's bobstays with one hand. He breathed, and, pulling himself up onto the chains, managed to reach the end of the bowsprit. There, a few sailors' breeches were drying.

He passed one. Then, having settled himself firmly, he listened.

We didn't sleep aboard the brig. On the contrary. We talked, we sang, we laughed. And here are the remarks, accompanied by swear words, that particularly struck Ayrton:

"What a great acquisition our brick is!"

— It works well, the Speedy! It deserves its name!

The entire Norfolk navy can go after him! Run after him!

— Hurrah for his commander!

"Hurrah for Bob Harvey!"

What Ayrton felt when he heard this fragment of conversation will be understood when one learns that, in this Bob Harvey, he had just recognized one of his old companions from Australia, a daring sailor who had taken up his criminal schemes. Bob Harvey had seized, near Norfolk Island, this brig, which was laden with weapons, ammunition, utensils, and tools of all kinds, destined for one of the sandwiches. His entire gang had boarded, and, pirates after being convicts, these wretches were scouring the Pacific, destroying ships, massacring crews, more ferocious than the Malays themselves!

These convicts were talking loudly, recounting their exploits while drinking excessively, and this is what Ayrton was able to understand:

The current crew of the Speedy consisted solely of English prisoners, escaped from Norfolk.

Now, this is what Norfolk is.

At 292° south latitude and 1654° east longitude, in eastern Australia, lies a small island six leagues in circumference, dominated by Mount Pitt, which rises to a height of eleven hundred feet above sea level. This is Norfolk Island, now the site of a penal colony where the most intractable convicts from English penal institutions are confined. There are five hundred of them, subjected to iron discipline and terrible punishments, guarded by one hundred and fifty soldiers and one hundred and fifty employees under the orders of a governor. It would be difficult to imagine a worse gathering of scoundrels. Occasionally—though rarely—despite the excessive surveillance to which they are subjected, several manage to escape by seizing ships they surprise and then roam the Polynesian archipelagos.

That's what Bob Harvey and his companions had done.

This was what Ayrton had once wanted to do. Bob Harvey had seized the brig the speedy, anchored within sight of Norfolk Island; the crew had been massacred, and, for a year, this ship, now a pirate vessel, had been scouring the Pacific seas, under the command of Harvey, formerly a sea captain, now a sea rover, and whom Ayrton knew well!

The convicts were mostly gathered in the quarterdeck at the rear of the ship, but a few, lying on the deck, were talking loudly.

The conversation continued amidst shouts and libations, and Ayrton learned that chance alone had brought the speedy into view of Lincoln Island.

Bob Harvey had never set foot there before, but, as Cyrus Smith had foreseen, finding this unknown land on his route, whose location was not indicated on any map, he had formed the plan to visit it, and, if necessary, if it suited him, to make it the home port of the brig.

As for the black flag flown from the speedy's horn and the cannon shot that had been fired, like warships when they raise their colors, it was pure pirate bravado.

This was not a signal, and no communication yet existed between the Norfolk escapees and Lincoln Island.

The settlers' domain was therefore threatened by immense danger. Obviously, the island, with its easy watering hole, its small port, its resources of all kinds so well developed by the settlers, its hidden depths of Granite-House, could only suit the convicts; in their hands, it would become an excellent place of refuge, and, by the very fact that it was unknown, it would assure them, for a long time perhaps, impunity with security.

Obviously, the lives of the settlers would not be respected, and the first concern of Bob Harvey and his accomplices would be to massacre them without mercy.

Cyrus Smith and his men didn't even have the option of fleeing or hiding on the island, since the convicts intended to reside there, and since, in case the speedy departed on an expedition, it was likely that some of the crew would remain ashore to establish themselves. Therefore, they had to fight; they had to destroy every last one of these wretches, unworthy of pity, against whom any means would be justified.

That's what Ayrton thought, and he knew that Cyrus Smith would share his point of view.

But was resistance, and ultimately victory, possible? That depended on the brig's armament and the number of men manning it. This is what Ayrton resolved to ascertain at all costs, and as, an hour after his arrival, the shouting had begun to subside, and many of the convicts were already plunged into a drunken sleep, Ayrton did not hesitate to venture onto the speedy's deck, which the extinguished lanterns then left in profound darkness.

He therefore climbed onto the bowsprit and, by way of the bowsprit, reached the forecastle of the brig. Slipping between the convicts lying

here and there, he circled the vessel and determined that the speedy was armed with four cannons, which would fire eight- to ten-pound cannonballs. He even verified, by touching them, that these cannons were breech-loading. They were therefore modern pieces of guns, easy to use and of terrible effect.

As for the men lying on the deck, there were probably about ten of them, but it was likely that many more were sleeping inside the brig. And besides, listening to them, Ayrton had gathered that there were about fifty of them on board. That was a lot for the six settlers on Lincoln Island! But in any case, thanks to Ayrton's dedication, Cyrus Smith wouldn't be caught off guard; he would know the strength of his adversaries and would take the necessary precautions.

All that remained for Ayrton was to return to report to his companions on the mission he had undertaken, and he prepared to return to the front of the brig, in order to slip into the sea.

But then, to this man who wanted—as he had said—to do more than his duty, a heroic thought came to him. It would mean sacrificing his life, but he would save the island and the settlers. Cyrus Smith obviously couldn't withstand fifty heavily armed bandits who, either by storming Granite House or by starving the besieged, would overcome them. And then he pictured his saviors, those who had made him a man

again, an honest man, those to whom he owed everything, killed without mercy, their work destroyed, their island transformed into a pirate's den! He told himself that he, Ayrton, was, in short, the primary cause of so much disaster, since his former companion, Bob Harvey, had only carried out his own plans, and a feeling of horror seized his entire being. And then he was seized by this irresistible urge to blow up the brig, and with it all those on board. Ayrton would perish in the explosion, but he would do his duty.

Ayrton didn't hesitate. Reaching the powder magazine, which is always located at the stern of a ship, was easy. A ship engaged in such a business shouldn't lack powder, and a single spark would be enough to annihilate it in an instant.

Ayrton carefully collapsed in the between-decks, which was strewn with numerous sleepers, weighed down more by drunkenness than sleep. A lantern was lit at the foot of the mainmast, around which hung a rack filled with firearms of all kinds.

Ayrton took a revolver from the rack and made sure it was loaded and primed. That was all he needed to carry out his work of destruction.

He therefore slipped towards the rear, so as to arrive under the quarterdeck of the brig, where the hold must have been.

However, on this almost dark tween deck, it was difficult to crawl without bumping into some still-sleepy convict. This led to curses and blows. Ayrton was forced to halt his progress more than once. But finally, he reached the bulkhead closing off the aft compartment and found the door that opened directly into the hold.

Ayrton, forced to use force, set to work.

It was a difficult task to accomplish silently, as it involved breaking a padlock. But under Ayrton's strong hand, the padlock sprang open and the door was unlocked... at that moment, an arm rested on Ayrton's shoulder.

"What are you doing here?" asked a tall man in a harsh voice, who, rising from the shadows, suddenly shone the light of a lantern in Ayrton's face.

Ayrton leaned back. In a quick flash of the lantern, he had recognized his former accomplice, Bob Harvey, but he couldn't recognize him, as Harvey must have believed Ayrton to be long dead.

"What are you doing here?" said Bob Harvey, grabbing Ayrton by the belt of his pants.

But Ayrton, without replying, vigorously pushed back the leader of the convicts and tried to dash into the hold. One shot from his revolver amidst those barrels of gunpowder, and it would all have been over!

"To me, boys!" Bob Harvey had cried. Two or three pirates, awakened by his voice, had risen, and, throwing themselves upon Ayrton, they tried to overpower him. The vigorous Ayrton broke free from their grasp. Two shots from his revolver rang out, and two convicts fell; but a knife blow that he could not parry slashed the flesh of his shoulder.

Ayrton understood that he could no longer carry out his plan. Bob Harvey had closed the hold door, and there was a movement in the hold that indicated a general awakening of the pirates.

Ayrton needed to conserve his energy to fight alongside Cyrus Smith. His only option was to flee!

But was escape still possible? It was doubtful, although Ayrton was determined to do everything he could to rejoin his companions.

Four shots remained. Two burst forth, one aimed at Bob Harvey, but it missed him, or at least not seriously. Ayrton, taking advantage of his adversaries' retreat, rushed towards the hatch ladder to reach the brig's deck. Passing the lantern, he smashed it with the butt of his rifle, plunging the ship into complete darkness, which would surely aid his escape. Two or three pirates, awakened by the noise, were descending the ladder at that moment. A fifth shot from Ayrton's revolver sent one of them tumbling down the steps, and the others scattered, bewildered by what was happening. In two bounds, Ayrton was on the brig's deck,

and three seconds later, after firing his revolver one last time into the face of a pirate who had just seized him by the neck, he leaped over the railings and plunged into the sea.

Ayrton hadn't gone six strokes before bullets were rattling around him like hail. What must have been the emotions of Pencroff, sheltering under a rock on the islet, and those of Cyrus Smith, the reporter, Harbert, and Nab, huddled in the funnels, when they heard those shots erupt aboard the brig. They had rushed onto the beach, and, with their rifles shouldered, they stood ready to repel any attack.

For them, there was no possible doubt!

Ayrton, surprised by the pirates, had been massacred by them, and perhaps these wretches would take advantage of the night to raid the island! Half an hour passed amidst deathly anguish. However, the gunfire had ceased, and neither Ayrton nor Pencroff reappeared. Was the islet overrun? Shouldn't they rush to the aid of Ayrton and Pencroff? But how?

The sea, high at that moment, made the canal impassable. The dugout canoe was no longer there! Imagine the terrible anxiety that seized Cyrus Smith and his companions!

Finally, around half past midnight, a canoe carrying two men reached the shore. It was Ayrton, slightly wounded in the shoulder, and Pencroff,

safe and sound, whom their friends welcomed with open arms. Immediately, they all took refuge in the smokestacks. There, Ayrton recounted what had happened and made no secret of his plan to blow up the brig, which he had tried to carry out.

All hands reached out to Ayrton, who made no secret of how serious the situation was.

The pirates were on high alert. They knew Lincoln Island was inhabited. They would only land there in large numbers and well-armed. They would respect nothing.

If the settlers fell into their hands, they would show no mercy!

"Well! We will know how to die!" said the reporter.

"Let's go back and keep watch," replied the engineer.

"Do we have any chance of getting out of this, Mr. Cyrus?" asked the sailor.

— Yes, Pencroff.

— Hmm! Six against fifty!

— Yes! Six!... not counting...

"Who then?" asked Pencroff.

Cyrus did not answer, but he pointed to the sky with his hand.

CHAPTER III

The night passed without incident. The colonists had remained vigilant and had not abandoned their post at the funnels. The pirates, for their part, seemed to have made no attempt to land. Since the last shots had been fired at Ayrton, not a detonation, not even a sound, had revealed the brig's presence on the island's shores. At a stretch, one might have thought that it had weighed anchor, believing itself to be facing too formidable a foe, and had moved away from these parts.

But that was not the case, and when dawn began to break, the colonists could glimpse a confused mass in the morning mist. It was the Speedy.

“Here, my friends,” said the engineer, “are the measures I believe we should take before this fog lifts completely. It hides us from the pirates’ sight, and we can act without arousing their attention. What is most important to make the convicts believe is that the island’s inhabitants are numerous and, consequently, capable of resisting them. I therefore propose that we divide ourselves into three groups, the first to be stationed at the chimneys themselves, the second at the mouth of the Mercy River. As for the third, I think it would be wise to place it on the islet, in order to prevent, or at least delay, any attempt at landing. We

have two carbines and four muskets at our disposal. Each of us will be armed, and, as we are amply supplied with powder and bullets, we will not hold back. We have nothing to fear from the muskets, nor even from the brig's cannons. What could they do against these rocks?" And, since we won't be firing from the windows of Granite House, the pirates won't get the idea of sending shells there that could cause irreparable damage. What we should fear is the need to resort to force, since the convicts have numbers on their side. Therefore, we must try to oppose any landing, but without revealing ourselves. So, let's not conserve ammunition. Let's fire often, but let's fire accurately. Each of us has eight or ten enemies to kill, and we must kill them!

Cyrus Smith had clearly assessed the situation, speaking in the calmest of voices, as if it were a matter of directing operations rather than fighting a battle. His companions approved these arrangements without a word. All that remained for each of them was to take up their post before the fog had completely lifted.

Nab and Pencroff immediately returned to Granite House and brought back sufficient ammunition. Gideon Spilett and Ayrton, both excellent marksmen, were armed with the two precision rifles, which had a range of nearly a mile. The four other rifles were distributed among Cyrus Smith, Nab, Pencroff, and Harbert.

Here is how the positions were composed.

Cyrus Smith and Harbert remained hidden at the chimneys, and thus they commanded the beach, at the foot of Granite-House, over a fairly wide radius.

Gideon Spilett and Nab went to huddle among the rocks at the mouth of the Mercy River — whose bridge and culverts had been raised — so as to prevent any passage by canoe and even any landing on the opposite bank.

As for Ayrton and Pencroff, they launched the canoe and prepared to cross the channel to occupy two separate positions on the islet. In this way, gunfire from four different points would lead the convicts to believe that the island was both sufficiently populated and heavily defended. In the event of a landing that they were unable to prevent, and even if they found themselves about to be outflanked by some boat from the brig, Pencroff and Ayrton were to return in the canoe to regain a foothold on the shore and proceed to the most threatened location.

Before taking up their posts, the colonists shook hands one last time. Pencroff managed to compose himself enough to suppress his emotion as he kissed Harbert, his child!... and they parted. A few moments later, Cyrus Smith and Harbert on one side, the reporter and Nab on the other, had disappeared behind the rocks, and five minutes later, Ayrton

and Pencroff, having fortunately crossed the channel, landed on the islet and hid in the crevices of its eastern shore. None of them could have been seen, for they themselves could barely make out the brig in the fog.

It was six-thirty in the morning.

Soon, the fog gradually broke apart in the upper layers of the air, and the mastheads of the brig emerged from the vapors. For a few moments longer, large plumes of mist rolled across the surface of the sea; then, a breeze arose, which quickly dispersed this mass of fog.

The speedy appeared in its entirety, anchored on two anchors, heading north, and presenting its port side to the island. As Cyrus Smith had estimated, it was no more than one and a quarter miles from the shore.

The sinister black flag flew from its horn.

The engineer, through his telescope, could see that the four cannons comprising the ship's artillery had been trained on the island. They were obviously ready to fire at the first signal.

However, the speedy remained silent. About thirty pirates could be seen coming and going on the deck. Some had climbed onto the quarterdeck; two others, stationed on the spars of the main topgallant

and equipped with spyglasses, were observing the island with extreme attention.

Certainly, Bob Harvey and his crew could hardly have realized what had happened during the night on board the brig.

This half-naked man, who had just forced open the powder magazine door and against whom they had fought, who had fired his revolver six times at them, who had killed one of their men and wounded two others—had this man escaped their bullets? Had he managed to swim back to shore? Where had he come from? What was he doing on board? Had his plan truly been to blow up the brig, as Bob Harvey believed? All of this must have been quite confused in the minds of the convicts. But what they could no longer doubt was that the unknown island off which the speedy had dropped anchor was inhabited, and that there might be an entire colony there ready to defend it. And yet, no one was showing themselves, neither on the beach nor on the hills. The coastline appeared to be completely deserted. In any case, there was no sign of habitation. Had the inhabitants fled inland?

This is what the pirate leader must have been wondering, and, no doubt, being a prudent man, he sought to reconnoiter the localities before engaging his band there.

For an hour and a half, no sign of attack or landing could be detected aboard the brig. It was clear that Bob Harvey was hesitating. His best glasses, no doubt, hadn't allowed him to glimpse a single one of the settlers huddled among the rocks. It wasn't even likely that his attention would have been drawn to the veil of green branches and vines that concealed the windows of Granite House and stood out against the bare wall. Indeed, how could he have imagined that a dwelling was carved, at that height, into the granite massif? From Cape Claw to Cape Mandible, all around the perimeter of Union Bay, nothing could have told him that the island was, or could be, inhabited.

At eight o'clock, however, the colonists observed some activity taking place on board the speedy. Things were being hauled onto the tackles of the boat-carriers, and a canoe was being launched.

Seven men disembarked. They were armed with rifles; one took the helm, four the oars, and the other two, crouching at the bow, ready to fire, examined the island. Their aim was undoubtedly to conduct an initial reconnaissance, but not to land, for in the latter case, they would have come in greater numbers.

The pirates, perched high in the rigging up to the topgallant masts, had obviously been able to see that an islet covered the coast and was separated from it by a channel about half a mile wide. However, it soon

became clear to Cyrus Smith, by observing the direction the boat was taking, that he would not first try to enter this channel, but would instead approach the islet—a justified precaution, indeed.

Pencroff and Ayrton, each hidden on their own side in narrow crevices in the rocks, saw him coming directly towards them, and they waited until he was within good range.

The canoe advanced with extreme caution.

The oars only dipped into the water at long intervals. One could also see that one of the convicts at the bow was holding a sounding line and trying to locate the channel carved by the Mercy current. This indicated Bob Harvey's intention to bring his brig as close to shore as possible. About thirty pirates, scattered among the shrouds, didn't miss a single movement of the boat and were marking landmarks that would allow them to land safely.

The boat was only two cables' lengths from the islet when it stopped. The helmsman, standing, was searching for the best spot to land. In an instant, two shots rang out. A wisp of smoke swirled above the rocks of the islet. The helmsman and the sounding-line-taker fell backward into the boat. Ayrton and Pencroff's bullets had struck them both at the same instant.

Almost immediately, a more violent detonation was heard, a brilliant jet of steam shot from the sides of the brig, and a cannonball, striking the top of the rocks that sheltered Ayrton and Pencroff, shattered them, but the two gunners had not been hit.

Horrible curses escaped from the canoe, which immediately resumed its course. The helmsman was instantly replaced by one of his comrades, and the oars plunged sharply into the water.

However, instead of returning to the ship, as one might have expected, the canoe extended along the shore of the islet, rounding it at its southern tip. The pirates rowed furiously to get out of range of the bullets.

They advanced thus to within five cable lengths of the inward part of the coastline which ended at the tip of the wreck, and, after having gone around it by a semi-circular line, still protected by the cannons of the brig, they headed towards the mouth of the Mercy.

Their obvious intention was to enter the channel and take the colonists stationed on the islet from the rear, so that they, however numerous, would be caught between the lights of the canoe and the brig, and thus find themselves in a very disadvantageous position. A quarter of an hour passed in this way, while the canoe advanced in that direction. Absolute silence, complete calm in the air and on the water.

Pencroff and Ayrton, although they understood that they risked being outmaneuvered, had not left their post, either because they did not want to show themselves to the attackers and expose themselves to the guns of the speedy, or because they were counting on Nab and Gideon Spilett, watching at the mouth of the river, and on Cyrus Smith and Harbert, ambushed in the rocks of the chimneys.

Twenty minutes after the first shots were fired, the boat was abeam of the Mercy, less than two cable lengths away. As the tide began to rise with its usual force, caused by the narrowness of the channel, the convicts felt themselves being pulled towards the river, and it was only by rowing that they managed to stay in the middle of the canal. But, as they passed within close range of the mouth of the Mercy, two bullets greeted them as they went by, and two more of their men were killed in the boat.

Nab and Spilett had not missed their target. Immediately, the brig fired a second cannonball at the post, betrayed by the smoke of the gunfire, but with no other result than to chip a few rocks. At this moment, the boat contained only three able-bodied men. Caught by the current, it sped through the channel with the speed of an arrow, passed in front of Cyrus Smith and Harbert, who, judging it out of range,

remained silent; then, rounding the northern tip of the islet with its two remaining oars, it was able to make its way back to the brig.

So far the settlers had no reason to complain.

The game was going badly for their opponents. The latter already had four men seriously wounded, perhaps dead; they, on the other hand, were unharmed and hadn't lost a single shot. If the pirates continued to attack them in this way, if they made another attempt to land using the canoe, they could be destroyed one by one.

It's clear how advantageous the engineer's precautions were. The pirates could believe they were facing numerous and well-armed adversaries, whom they wouldn't easily overcome. Half an hour passed before the boat, struggling against the open sea current, reached the speedy. Terrifying cries rang out when it returned on board with the wounded, and three or four cannon shots were fired, which could have no effect.

But then other convicts, drunk with anger and perhaps still from the previous night's revelry, threw themselves into the boat, numbering about a dozen. A second canoe was also launched, in which eight men took their places, and while the first headed straight for the islet to flush out the colonists, the second maneuvered to force its way into the Mercy.

The situation was obviously becoming very perilous for Pencroff and Ayrton, and they understood that they had to return to free land.

However, they waited until the first boat was within range, and two well-aimed shots again threw its crew into disarray. Then, Pencroff and Ayrton, abandoning their post, not without having taken about ten shots from their muskets, crossed the islet with all their might, jumped into the canoe, passed through the channel just as the second boat reached its southern tip, and ran to take cover at the smokestacks; they had scarcely reached Cyrus Smith and Harbert, when the islet was overrun and the pirates from the first boat were running all over it.

Almost at the same moment, new detonations rang out at the Mercy post, whose second boat had rapidly approached. Two of the eight men who were on board were mortally wounded by Gideon Spilett and Nab, and the boat itself, irresistibly carried onto the reefs, was wrecked there at the mouth of the Mercy.

But the six survivors, raising their weapons above their heads to protect them from the water, managed to reach the right bank of the river. Then, seeing themselves too exposed to the fire of the outpost, they fled at full speed towards the tip of the wreck, out of range of the bullets.

The current situation was therefore as follows: on the islet, twelve convicts, several of whom were wounded, no doubt, but still had a canoe at their disposal; on the island, six had landed, but were unable to reach Granite-House, as they could not cross the river, whose bridges were raised.

"That's all right!" said Pencroff, rushing up the chimneys, "That's all right, Mr. Cyrus! What do you think?"

"I think," replied the engineer, "that the fight will take a new form, because we cannot assume that these convicts are unintelligent enough to continue it under such unfavorable conditions for them!"

"They still won't cross the canal," said the sailor. "Ayrton and Mr. Spilett's rifles are there to stop them. You know very well they have a range of over a mile!"

"No doubt," replied Harbert, "but what could two rifles do against the brig's cannons?"

"Hey! The brig isn't in the canal yet, I imagine!" replied Pencroff.

"And if he comes?" said Cyrus Smith.

— That's impossible, because he would risk running aground and getting lost!

"It's possible," Ayrton replied. "The convicts can take advantage of high tide to enter the canal, even if it means running aground at low tide, and then, under the fire of their cannons, our posts will no longer be tenable."

"By a thousand devils in hell!" cried Pencroff, "it truly seems that the beggars are preparing to weigh anchor!"

"Perhaps we will be forced to take refuge in Granite-House?" Harbert observed.

"Let's wait!" replied Cyrus Smith.

— But Neb and M Spilett?... said Pencroff.

"They'll reach us in due time. Be ready, Ayrton. It's your rifle and Spilett's that must do the talking now."

This was all too true! The speedy was beginning to turn on its anchor and clearly intended to approach the islet. The tide was expected to rise for another hour and a half, and, with the flood tide already broken, it would be easy for the brig to maneuver. But as for entering the channel, Pencroff, contrary to Ayrton's opinion, could not bear the thought of him daring to attempt it.

Meanwhile, the pirates who had occupied the islet had gradually moved to the opposite shore, and were now separated from the

mainland only by the channel. Armed only with rifles, they could do no harm to the colonists, who were lying in ambush either at the chimneys or at the mouth of the Mercy River; but, not knowing them to be equipped with long-range rifles, they also did not believe themselves to be personally exposed. It was therefore in the open that they patrolled the islet and its shoreline.

Their illusion was short-lived. Ayrton and Gideon Spilett's rifles then spoke, and no doubt said unpleasant things to two of these convicts, for they fell backwards.

It was a general rout. The other ten didn't even take the time to pick up their wounded or dead companions; they rushed to the other side of the islet, threw themselves into the boat that had brought them there, and rowed back to shore.

"Eight fewer!" exclaimed Pencroff. "Really, it seems Mr. Spilett and Ayrton have conspired to operate together!"

"Gentlemen," replied Ayrton, reloading his rifle, "this is about to get more serious. The brig is setting sail!"

"The anchor is on the edge!" cried Pencroff.

"Yes, and she's already going off the rails."

Indeed, the distinct clatter of the latch striking the windlass could be heard as the brig's crew turned. The speedy had first come under the pull of its anchor; then, when it had been pulled from the seabed, it began to drift towards land. The wind was blowing from offshore; the jib and topsail were hoisted, and the ship gradually drew closer to shore. From the two watchtowers of the Mercy and the funnels, they watched it maneuver without giving any sign of life, but not without a certain amount of anxiety. It would be a terrible situation for the colonists, exposed at close range to the brig's cannon fire, and unable to return fire effectively. How then could they prevent the pirates from landing?

Cyrus Smith sensed this, and he wondered what could be done. Before long, he would be called upon to make a decision. But which one?

To shut themselves up in Granite-House, to let themselves be besieged there, to hold out for weeks, even months, since provisions were plentiful there? Fine! But then what? The pirates would still be masters of the island, which they would ravage at will, and, in time, they would eventually overcome the prisoners of Granite-House.

However, one chance remained: that Bob Harvey would not venture into the channel with his ship and would stay outside the islet. He

would still be half a mile from the shore, and at that distance, his attacks might not be extremely damaging.

"Never," Pencroff repeated, "never will Bob Harvey, since he is a good sailor, enter the canal! He knows full well that it would risk the brig, if the sea were to become rough! And what would become of him without his ship?"

However, the brig had approached the islet, and it could be seen that it was trying to reach its lower end. The breeze was light, and, as the current had lost much of its strength, Bob Harvey was completely free to maneuver as he wished.

The route previously taken by the boats had allowed him to reconnoiter the channel, and he had brazenly entered it. His plan was all too understandable: he wanted to anchor in front of the funnels and, from there, respond with shells and cannonballs to the bullets that had thus far decimated his crew.

Soon the speedy reached the tip of the islet; it rounded it with ease; the brigantine was then cleared, and the brig, hugging the wind, found itself abeam of the Mercy.

"The bandits! They're coming!" cried Pencroff.

At that moment, Cyrus Smith, Ayrton, the sailor and Harbert were joined by Nab and Gideon Spilett.

The reporter and his companion had deemed it wise to abandon the Mercy's post, from where they could do nothing more against the ship, and they had acted accordingly. It was better that the colonists be assembled at the moment when decisive action was likely to begin. Gideon Spilett and Nab had arrived by sneaking behind the rocks, but not without being met with a hail of bullets that had missed them.

"Spilett! Nab!" the engineer exclaimed. "You're not hurt?"

"No!" replied the reporter, "only a few bruises, from the impact! But that damned brig is going into the canal!"

— Yes! replied Pencroff, and, within ten minutes, he will have anchored in front of Granite-House!

"Do you have a project, Cyrus?" asked the reporter.

— We must take refuge in Granite-House, while there is still time and the convicts cannot see us.

"That's my opinion too," replied Gideon Spilett; "but once they're locked up..."

"We will take the circumstances into account," replied the engineer.

— Let's go then, and hurry! said the reporter.

"Don't you want Ayrton and me to stay here, Mr. Cyrus?" asked the sailor.

“What’s the point, Pencroff?” replied Cyrus Smith. “No. Let’s not separate!”

There was not a moment to lose. The colonists left the funnels. A small return of the curtain wall prevented them from being seen by the brig; but two or three detonations and the crash of cannonballs on the rocks told them that the speedy was now only a short distance away.

Rushing into the elevator, hoisting themselves up to the door of Granite-House, where Top and Jup had been locked up since the day before, dashing into the great hall, it was all a matter of a moment.

It was high time, for the colonists, through the branches, caught sight of the speedy, enveloped in smoke, speeding down the canal. They even had to step aside, for the discharges were incessant, and the cannonballs from the four guns struck blindly both the Mercy's outpost, though it was no longer manned, and the smokestacks. Rocks were shattered, and cheers accompanied each detonation.

However, it was hoped that Granite-House would be spared, thanks to the precaution Cyrus Smith had taken to conceal its windows, when a cannonball, grazing the doorway, entered the corridor.

"Damn it! We've been discovered?" cried Pencroff.

Perhaps the settlers had not been seen, but it was certain that Bob Harvey had deemed it appropriate to send a projectile through the

suspicious foliage that masked this portion of the high wall.

Soon, he even redoubled his blows, when another cannonball, having pierced the curtain of foliage, revealed a gaping opening in the granite.

The settlers' situation was desperate. Their retreat was discovered. They could neither obstruct these projectiles nor protect the stone, whose fragments flew like grapeshot around them.

They had no choice but to take refuge in the upper corridor of Granite-House and abandon their home to all the devastation, when a dull noise was heard, which was followed by terrifying screams!

Cyrus Smith and his men rushed to one of the windows...

The brig, irresistibly lifted on a sort of waterspout, had just split in two, and, in less than ten seconds, it was swallowed up with its criminal crew!

CHAPTER IV

"They jumped!" cried Harbert.

— Yes! Jumped like Ayrton had set the powder keg on fire! replied Pencroff, throwing himself into the elevator, along with Nab and the young boy.

"But what happened?" asked Gideon Spilett, still stunned by this unexpected turn of events.

"Ah! This time we'll know!" replied the engineer quickly.

— What will we know?...

"Later! Later! Come on, Spilett. The important thing is that these pirates have been exterminated!"

And Cyrus Smith, leading the reporter and Ayrton, joined Pencroff, Nab and Harbert on the beach.

Nothing of the brig could be seen anymore, not even its masts.

After being lifted by the waterspout, it had rolled onto its side and sunk in that position, undoubtedly due to some massive flooding. But, as the channel at that point was no more than twenty feet deep, it was certain that the sides of the submerged brig would reappear at low tide. A few pieces of wreckage were floating on the surface of the sea.

We could see a whole mess, consisting of spare masts and yards, chicken coops with their birds still alive, crates and barrels which, little by little, were rising to the surface, after having escaped through the hatches; but there was no debris adrift, neither planks of the deck, nor planking of the hull, — which made the sudden sinking of the speedy quite inexplicable.

However, the two masts, which had been broken a few feet above the mast step, after snapping their stays and shrouds, soon rose back onto the waters of the channel, with their sails, some unfurled and others furled. But they couldn't let the ebb tide carry away all this wealth, and Ayrton and Pencroff jumped into the canoe with the intention of mooring all the wreckage either to the shore of the island or to the shore of the islet.

But just as they were about to embark, a remark from Gideon Spilett stopped them.

"And what about the six convicts who landed on the right bank of the Mercy?" he said.

Indeed, it should not be forgotten that the six men whose canoe had broken on the rocks had landed at the tip of the wreck.

We looked in that direction. None of the fugitives were visible. It was likely that, after seeing the brig sink into the canal waters, they had fled inland.

“We’ll deal with them later,” Cyrus Smith said. “They can still be dangerous, because they’re armed, but after all, six against six, the odds are even. So let’s get to the most urgent matter.”

Ayrton and Pencroff boarded the dugout canoe and swam vigorously towards the wrecks.

The sea was calm then, and very high, because the moon had been new for two days. At least an hour would therefore have to pass before the hull of the brig emerged from the waters of the canal.

Ayrton and Pencroff had time to secure the masts and spars with ropes, the ends of which were taken to the beach at Granite House. There, the colonists, working together, managed to haul the wrecks to safety. Then the dugout canoe collected everything that was floating—chicken cages, barrels, crates—which were immediately taken to the funnels.

A few corpses were also floating. Among others, Ayrton recognized Bob Harvey's, and he showed it to his companion, saying in a moved voice:

"What I was, Pencroff!"

"But that's what you're no longer, brave Ayrton!" replied the sailor.

It was quite strange that the bodies that were floating were so few in number. There were barely five or six, which the ebbing tide was already beginning to carry away towards the open sea.

Most likely, the convicts, caught off guard by the ship's sinking, hadn't had time to flee, and with the vessel listing to one side, most of them remained trapped beneath the bulwarks. The receding tide, which

would carry the bodies of these wretches out to sea, would spare the colonists the grim task of burying them somewhere on their island.

For two hours, Cyrus Smith and his companions were solely occupied with hauling the spars onto the sand and unbarking, then hauling the sails ashore, which were perfectly intact. They spoke little, so absorbed were they in the work, but what thoughts raced through their minds! Possession of this brig, or rather of everything it contained, was a fortune. Indeed, a ship is like a complete little world, and the colony's supplies would soon be augmented by a good number of useful items. It would be, on a grand scale, the equivalent of the crate found at the tip of the wreck.

"And besides," thought Pencroff, "why would it be impossible to refloat this brig? If it only has one leak, it can be plugged, one leak, and a ship of three to four hundred tons is a real ship compared to our Bonadventure! And you can go far with that! And you can go wherever you want! Mr. Cyrus, Ayrton, and I will have to look into it! It's worth it!"

Indeed, if the brig was still seaworthy, the chances of repatriating the settlers from Lincoln Island would be significantly increased.

But, in order to decide this important question, it was necessary to wait until the sea was completely low, so that the hull of the brig could be inspected in all its parts.

Once the wreckage had been safely ashore, Cyrus Smith and his companions took a few moments to eat lunch. They were literally starving. Fortunately, the mess hall wasn't far away, and Nab could pass for a quick and efficient cook. So they ate by the fireplaces, and, as you can imagine, the only topic of conversation during this meal was the unexpected event that had so miraculously saved the colony.

"Miraculously is the word," Pencroff repeated, "for it must be admitted that those scoundrels jumped at just the right moment! Granite-House was beginning to become singularly uninhabitable!"

"And imagine, Pencroff," asked the reporter, "how it happened, and who could have caused this explosion of the brig?"

“Well, Mr. Spilett, nothing could be simpler,” replied Pencroff. “A pirate ship isn’t run like a warship! Convicts aren’t sailors! It’s certain the brig’s holds were open, since we were being bombarded relentlessly, and it would have taken only one careless or clumsy person to blow up the engine!”

“Mr. Cyrus,” said Harbert, “what surprises me is that this explosion didn’t have a greater impact. The detonation wasn’t strong, and, all things considered, there’s little debris and few planks torn off. It would seem that the ship sank rather than exploded.”

"Does that surprise you, my child?" asked the engineer.

— Yes, Mr. Cyrus.

"And me too, Harbert," replied the engineer, "that surprises me; but when we visit the hull of the brig, we will no doubt have the explanation for this fact."

"Ah, Mr. Cyrus," said Pencroff, "you're not going to claim that the Speedy simply sank like a ship hitting a reef?"

"Why not?" Nab remarked, "if there are rocks in the canal?"

"Well, Nab," replied Pencroff. "You didn't open your eyes at the right time. A moment before it went down, the brig, I saw it perfectly well, rose up over a huge wave, and it fell back down, crashing to port. Now, if it had only touched the waves, it would have sunk quite calmly, like an honest ship going to the bottom."

"That's precisely because it wasn't an honest ship!" replied Nab.

"Well, we'll see, Pencroff," the engineer continued.

“We shall see,” added the sailor, “but I’d bet my head there are no rocks in the canal. Now then, Mr. Cyrus, all right, would you say there’s something marvelous about this event?”

Cyrus Smith did not respond.

"In any case," said Gideon Spilett, "shock or explosion, you will agree, Pencroff, that it happened at just the right time!"

"Yes!... yes!... replied the sailor... but that's not the point. I'm asking Mr. Smith if he sees anything supernatural in all this."

“I’m not making a decision, Pencroff,” said the engineer. “That’s all I can tell you.”

This answer did not satisfy Pencroff in the slightest. He maintained it was "an explosion," and he refused to budge. He would never admit that in this channel, formed of a bed of fine sand, like the beach itself, and which he had often crossed at low tide, there could be an unknown reef. Besides, at the moment the brig sank, the tide was high, meaning there was more water than it needed to clear, without striking them, any rocks that would not have been exposed at low tide. Therefore, there could not have been a collision. Therefore, the ship had not touched. Therefore, it had exploded.

And it must be admitted that the sailor's reasoning was not without a certain degree of accuracy.

At about half past one, the colonists boarded the dugout canoe and went to the site of the grounding. It was regrettable that the brig's two boats could not have been saved; but one, as is known, had been broken at the mouth of the Mercy and was completely unusable; the other had disappeared in the brig's sinking, and, doubtless crushed by it, had not reappeared.

At that moment, the hull of the speedy began to emerge above the water. The brig was more than lying on its side, for, having broken its masts under the weight of its ballast displaced by the fall, it was almost standing keel-first. It had been truly overturned by the inexplicable but terrifying underwater action, which had simultaneously manifested itself in the movement of an enormous waterspout.

The colonists circled the hull, and, as the tide went out, they were able to discern, if not the cause of the disaster, at least its effect. On the bow, on both sides of the keel, seven or eight feet before the stem, the brig's sides were horribly torn open for a length of at least twenty feet. There were two wide breaches that could not have been plugged. Not only had the copper sheathing and planking disappeared, undoubtedly reduced to dust, but even the frames themselves, the iron pegs and the spars that held them together, were completely gone. All along the hull, as far as the stern, the strakes, shredded, were no longer holding. The false keel had been separated with inexplicable violence, and the keel itself, torn from the hull in several places, was broken along its entire length.

"A thousand devils!" cried Pencroff. "That's a ship that will be difficult to refloat!"

"It will be impossible," said Ayrton.

“In any case,” Gideon Spilett remarked to the sailor, “the explosion, if there was one, produced some peculiar effects! It ripped open the ship’s hull in its lower sections, instead of blowing off the deck and the topsides! These large openings appear to have been made by the impact of a reef rather than by the explosion of a hold!”

"There are no shoals in the channel!" replied the sailor. "I'll admit anything you want, except hitting a rock!"

"Let's try to get inside the brig," said the engineer. "Perhaps we'll find out what caused its destruction."

This was the best course of action, and it was also necessary to inventory all the riches contained on board, and to make every effort to save them.

Access to the inside of the brick was easy then.

The water level continued to drop, and the underside of the deck, now the upper deck due to the hull's capsize, was accessible. The ballast, composed of heavy cast-iron ingots, had breached it in several places. The sea could be heard roaring as it poured through the cracks in the hull.

Cyrus Smith and his companions, axes in hand, advanced onto the half-broken bridge. Crates of all kinds cluttered it, and, as they had only

been in the water for a very limited time, perhaps their contents were not spoiled.

So, they set about securing the entire cargo. The water wasn't expected to return for several hours, and those few hours were used to the utmost advantage. Ayrton and Pencroff had attached a block and tackle to the opening in the hull, which was used to hoist the barrels and crates. The dugout canoe received them and immediately transported them to the beach. They took everything indiscriminately, with the option of sorting the items later. In any case, what the colonists were immediately able to observe with great satisfaction was that the brig carried a very varied cargo, an assortment of all sorts of goods: utensils, manufactured products, tools, such as are typically found on ships engaged in the coastal trade around Polynesia. It was likely that they would find a little bit of everything, and it must be agreed that this was precisely what the Lincoln Island colony needed.

However—and Cyrus Smith observed this in silent astonishment—not only had the brig's hull, as has been said, suffered enormous damage from whatever impact had caused the disaster, but the interior was devastated, especially forward. Bulkheads and stanchions were shattered as if some formidable shell had exploded inside the brig. The colonists were able to move easily from bow to stern, after having

moved the crates that were being extracted as they went along. These were not heavy bales, which would have been difficult to move, but simple parcels, whose securing, moreover, was no longer recognizable.

The colonists then reached the stern of the brig, the section that had once been surmounted by the poop deck. It was there, following Ayrton's directions, that they should look for the powder magazine. Cyrus Smith believed it had not exploded, so it was possible that some barrels could be salvaged, and that the powder, which is usually contained in metal casings, might not have been damaged by contact with the water.

This was indeed what had happened. In the middle of a large quantity of projectiles, about twenty barrels were found, the inside of which was lined with copper, and which were carefully extracted.

Pencroff became convinced by his own eyes that the destruction of the speedy could not be attributed to an explosion. The section of the hull containing the cargo bay was precisely the one that had suffered the least damage.

"Possibly!" replied the stubborn sailor, "but as for a rock, there are no rocks in the channel!"

"So, what happened?" asked Harbert.

“I don’t know,” replied Pencroff, “Mr. Cyrus doesn’t know, and nobody knows or ever will!”

During these various searches, several hours had passed, and the floodwaters were beginning to rise. The rescue operations had to be suspended.

Moreover, there was no fear that the brig's hull would be carried away by the sea, for it was already stuck in the mud, and as firmly fixed as if it had been straddled on its anchors.

It was therefore perfectly possible to wait for the next ebb tide to resume operations. But, as for the building itself, it was well and truly doomed, and it would be necessary to hurry to salvage the wreckage of the hull, for it would soon disappear into the quicksand of the canal.

It was five o'clock in the evening. The day had been hard for the workers. They ate with great appetite, and, whatever their fatigue, they could not resist, after their dinner, the desire to visit the crates that made up the cargo of the speedy.

Most of them contained ready-made clothing, which, it is believed, was well received. There was enough there to clothe an entire colony, linen for every purpose, and shoes for every foot.

"We're too rich now!" exclaimed Pencroff. "But what are we going to do with all this?"

And every moment, the joyful sailor's cheers erupted as he recognized barrels of rum, bundles of tobacco, firearms and bladed weapons, bales of cotton, farming implements, carpenter's, joiner's, and blacksmith's tools, and crates of every kind of grain, unaltered by their brief sojourn in the water. Ah! Two years earlier, how timely these things would have been! But even now, now that these industrious settlers had equipped themselves, these riches would find their use.

There was plenty of room in the Granite House stores; but that day, time ran out, and they couldn't store everything. It was important to remember, however, that six survivors from the speedy's crew had landed on the island, that they were likely first-rate scoundrels, and that they posed a serious threat. Although the Mercy's deck and culverts had been raised, these convicts weren't bothered by a river or a stream, and, driven by despair, such rogues could be quite dangerous.

Later, we would see what course of action should be taken with regard to them; but, in the meantime, it was necessary to watch over the crates and parcels piled up near the chimneys, and this is what the colonists took turns doing during the night.

The night passed, however, without the convicts attempting any aggression. Master Jup and Top, on guard at the foot of Granite-House, would have quickly reported them.

The three days that followed, October 19, 20, and 21, were spent salvaging everything of value or use, whether from the cargo or the brig's rigging. At low tide, the hold was moved. At high tide, the salvaged items were stowed away. A large portion of the copper sheathing was removed from the hull, which sank deeper into the mud each day. But before the sands swallowed the heavy objects that had sunk to the bottom, Ayrton and Pencroff, having dived several times to the channel bed, recovered the brig's chains and anchors, its ballast ingots, and even the four cannons, which, lightened by means of empty barrels, were brought ashore.

It is clear that the colony's arsenal had benefited no less from the rescue than the offices and stores at Granite House. Pencroff, ever enthusiastic about his projects, was already talking about building a battery that would control the canal and the river mouth. With four cannons, he pledged to prevent any fleet, "however powerful," from venturing into the waters of Lincoln Island! Meanwhile, when all that remained of the brig was a useless hulk, bad weather arrived and finished it off. Cyrus Smith had intended to blow it up in order to salvage the wreckage on the shore, but a strong northeast wind and rough seas allowed him to conserve his gunpowder. Indeed, during the

night of the 23rd to the 24th, the brig's hull was completely dismantled, and some of the wreckage washed ashore.

As for the ship's papers, needless to say, although Cyrus Smith had thoroughly searched the quarterdeck lockers, he found no trace of them. The pirates had evidently destroyed everything concerning either the captain or the owner of the speedy, and since the name of its home port was not displayed on the stern, nothing could suggest its nationality. However, based on certain lines of its bow, Ayrton and Pencroff had seemed to believe that this brig must be of English construction.

Eight days after the disaster, or rather after the fortunate but inexplicable outcome to which the colony owed its salvation, nothing of the ship could be seen, even at low tide. Its wreckage had been scattered, and Granite-House was rich with almost everything it had contained.

However, the mystery surrounding its strange destruction would likely never have been solved if, on November 30th, Nab, prowling along the shore, hadn't found a piece of a thick iron cylinder bearing traces of an explosion. This cylinder was twisted and torn at its edges, as if it had been subjected to the action of an explosive substance.

Nab brought this piece of metal to his master, who was then busy with his companions in the chimney workshop.

Cyrus Smith examined the cylinder carefully, then, turning to Pencroff:

"You persist, my friend," he said to him, "in maintaining that the speedy did not perish as a result of a collision?"

"Yes, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor. "You know as well as I do that there are no rocks in the canal."

"But what if it had hit this piece of iron?" said the engineer, pointing to the broken cylinder.

"What, this piece of pipe?" exclaimed Pencroff in a tone of complete disbelief.

"My friends," Cyrus Smith continued, "do you remember that before it sank, the brig rose to the top of a veritable waterspout?"

"Yes, Mr. Cyrus!" replied Harbert.

"Well, do you want to know what caused this tornado? It's this," said the engineer, pointing to the broken tube.

"This?" replied Pencroff.

— Yes! This cylinder is all that remains of a torpedo!

"A torpedo!" cried the engineer's companions.

"And who put that torpedo there?" asked Pencroff, who did not want to surrender.

“All I can tell you is that it wasn’t me!” replied Cyrus Smith, “but she was there, and you were able to judge her incomparable power!”

CHAPTER V

So, everything was explained by the underwater explosion of that torpedo. Cyrus Smith, who during the Union War had had the opportunity to experiment with these terrible weapons of destruction, couldn't be mistaken. It was under the action of this cylinder, loaded with an explosive substance—nitroglycerin, picrate, or some other material of the same nature—that the canal water had sprung up like a waterspout, that the brig, struck by lightning in its bilge, had sunk instantly, and that was why it had been impossible to refloat it, so considerable was the damage to its hull. The speedy had been unable to withstand a torpedo that would have destroyed an armored frigate as easily as a simple fishing boat!

Yes! Everything was explained, everything... except for the presence of that torpedo in the canal waters!

“My friends,” Cyrus Smith continued, “we can no longer doubt the presence of a mysterious being, a castaway like ourselves perhaps,

abandoned on our island. I say this so that Ayrton will be aware of the strange events that have transpired over the past two years. Who is this benevolent stranger whose intervention, so fortunate for us, has manifested itself on so many occasions? I cannot imagine it. What interest could he have in acting thus, in hiding after so many services rendered? I cannot understand it. But his services are nonetheless real, and of the kind that only a man possessing prodigious power could render us. Ayrton is indebted to him as we are, for if it was this stranger who saved me from the waves after the balloon crashed, it is evidently he who wrote the document, who placed this bottle on the canal route, and who informed us of our companion's situation." I would add that this crate, so conveniently stocked with everything we lacked, was the one he guided and beached at the tip of the wreck; that the light placed on the island's heights, which allowed you to land, was the one he lit; that the lead pellet found in the peccary's body, was the one he pulled out; that the torpedo that destroyed the brig, was the one he submerged in the channel; in short, that all these inexplicable events, which we could not have understood, are due to this mysterious being. Therefore, whoever he may be, shipwrecked or exiled on this island, we would be ungrateful if we believed ourselves absolved of all gratitude

towards him. We have incurred a debt, and I have hope that we will repay it one day.

“You are right to speak thus, my dear Cyrus,” replied Gideon Spilett. “Yes, there is a being, almost all-powerful, hidden somewhere on the island, whose influence has been singularly useful to our colony. I would add that this unknown being seems to possess means of action that would border on the supernatural, if the supernatural were acceptable in the course of practical life. Is it he who communicates secretly with us through the well at Granite House, and is he thus aware of all our plans? Is it he who handed us that bottle when the canoe made its first voyage to sea? Is it he who cast Top from the waters of the lake and killed the dugong? Is it he, as everything suggests, who saved you from the waves, Cyrus, and in circumstances where no other man could have acted? If it is he, then he possesses a power that makes him master of the elements.”

The reporter's observation was correct, and everyone felt it.

“Yes,” replied Cyrus Smith, “if the intervention of a human being is no longer in doubt for us, I agree that he has means of action at his disposal beyond those available to humanity. Therein lies a mystery, but if we discover the man, the mystery will also be revealed. The question,

then, is this: should we respect the anonymity of this generous being, or should we do everything to reach him? What is your opinion on this?”

"My opinion," replied Pencroff, "is that, whoever he is, he is a good man, and he has my esteem!"

"So be it," Cyrus Smith replied, "but that's not an answer, Pencroff."

"My master," said Nab then, "I have a thought that we can search for the gentleman in question as long as we want, but we will only discover him when he pleases."

"That's not a bad point, what you're saying, Nab," replied Pencroff.

“I agree with Nab,” replied Gideon Spilett, “but that’s no reason not to try the adventure. Whether we find this mysterious being or not, we will at least have fulfilled our duty to him.”

"And you, my child, give us your opinion," said the engineer, turning to Harbert.

"Ah!" cried Harbert, his eyes lighting up, "I would like to thank him, the one who saved you first and who saved us afterwards!"

"Not disgusted, my boy," retorted Pencroff, "neither am I, nor are we! I'm not curious, but I'd gladly give one of my eyes to see that fellow face to face! It seems to me he must be handsome, tall, strong, with a fine

beard, hair like rays of light, and that he must be lying on clouds, a large ball in his hand!"

"Well, Pencroff," replied Gideon Spilett, "that's a portrait of God the Father you're painting for us!"

"Perhaps, Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor, "but that's how I imagine it!"

"And you, Ayrton?" asked the engineer.

“Mr. Smith,” replied Ayrton, “I can scarcely offer you my opinion in this matter. Whatever you do will be well done. When you wish to involve me in your research, I will be ready to follow you.”

“Thank you, Ayrton,” Cyrus Smith continued, “but I would like a more direct answer to my question. You are our companion; you have already shown your service to us on several occasions, and, like everyone here, you must be consulted when important decisions are being made. So speak.”

“Mr. Smith,” Ayrton replied, “I think we must do everything we can to find this unknown benefactor. Perhaps he is alone? Perhaps he is suffering? Perhaps this is a life to be repeated? I, too, as you said, owe him a debt of gratitude. It was he—it could only have been he—who came to Tabor Island, who found the wretch you knew there, who let you know that there was a poor man there to be saved!… It is thanks to him that I became a man again. No, I will never forget him!”

“It’s decided,” said Cyrus Smith. “We will begin our search as soon as possible. We will not leave any part of the island unexplored. We will search it to its most secret recesses, and may this unknown friend forgive us for our intention!”

For several days, the colonists actively engaged in haymaking and harvesting. Before embarking on their plan to explore the still-unknown parts of the island, they wanted all essential tasks completed. This was also the time for harvesting the various vegetables grown on Tabor Island. Everything needed to be stored, and fortunately, there was ample space at Granite House, where all the island's bounty could have been stored. The colony's produce lay there, methodically arranged and, one can be sure, safe from both animals and men. No dampness was to be feared amidst this thick granite massif.

Several of the natural excavations located in the upper corridor were enlarged or hollowed out, either with a pick or with a mine, and Granite-House also became a general warehouse containing supplies, ammunition, tools and spare utensils, in short, all the equipment of the colony.

As for the cannons from the brig, they were fine pieces of cast steel which, at Pencroff's insistence, were hoisted by means of winches and cranes right up to the landing at Granite House; embrasures were made

between the windows, and soon their gleaming muzzles could be seen extending through the granite wall. From this height, these guns truly commanded the entire Union Bay. It was like a small Gibraltar, and any ship that anchored off the islet would inevitably have been exposed to the fire of this aerial battery.

"Mr. Cyrus," said Pencroff one day, — it was November 8th, — now that this armament is finished, we must nevertheless test the range of our pieces.

"Do you think that will be useful?" replied the engineer.

— It's more than useful, it's necessary! Without it, how can we know the distance we can send one of those lovely cannonballs we're supplied with?

"Let's try it then, Pencroff," replied the engineer. "However, I think we should conduct the experiment using not ordinary gunpowder, the supply of which I intend to leave intact, but pyroxile, which we will never run out of."

"Will these cannons be able to withstand the blast of pyroxile?" asked the reporter, who was no less eager than Pencroff to try out the artillery at Granite-House.

"I believe so. Besides," added the engineer, "we will act cautiously."

The engineer had good reason to believe that these cannons were of excellent manufacture, and he knew what he was doing. Made of forged steel and breech-loading, they should, by their very nature, be able to withstand a considerable load and consequently have an enormous range. Indeed, from the point of view of effectiveness, the trajectory described by the cannonball must be as flat as possible, and this flatness can only be achieved if the projectile has a very high initial velocity.

“Now,” Cyrus Smith told his companions, “the initial velocity is directly related to the amount of powder used. The whole question, in the manufacture of the parts, boils down to using the strongest possible metal, and steel is undoubtedly the most resistant of all metals. I therefore have reason to believe that our cannons will withstand the expansion of the pyroxile gases without risk and will produce excellent results.”

"We'll be much more certain when we've tried it!" replied Pencroff.

It goes without saying that the four cannons were in perfect condition. Since they had been taken out of the water, the sailor had devoted himself to meticulously polishing them. How many hours he had spent scrubbing, greasing, and polishing them, cleaning the breech mechanism, the locking bolt, and the pressure screw! And now these

parts were as bright as if they had been aboard a United States Navy frigate.

So on that day, in the presence of all the colony's staff, including Master Jup and Top, the four cannons were successively tested. They were loaded with pyroxile, taking into account its explosive power, which, as has been said, is four times that of ordinary gunpowder; the projectile they were to launch was cylindro-conical.

Pencroff, holding the fuse cord, was ready to fire. At a signal from Cyrus Smith, the shot went off. The cannonball, aimed at the sea, passed over the islet and disappeared offshore, at a distance that could not be precisely determined.

The second cannon was aimed at the extreme rocks at the tip of the wreck, and the projectile, striking a sharp stone nearly three miles from Granite-House, shattered it.

It was Harbert who had aimed the gun and fired it, and he was very proud of his first shot.

Only Pencroff could be prouder than him! Such a feat, the honor of which belonged to his dear child!

The third projectile, launched this time at the dunes that formed the upper coast of Union Bay, struck the sand at a distance of at least four miles; then, after ricocheting, it was lost at sea in a cloud of foam.

For the fourth shot, Cyrus Smith increased the charge slightly to test its maximum range. Then, with everyone standing back in case it exploded, the fuse was lit using a long cord. A violent detonation was heard, but the shot had held, and the colonists, rushing to the window, saw the projectile chip off the rocks of Cape Mandible, nearly five miles from Granite House, and disappear into Shark Bay.

"Well, Mr. Cyrus," cried Pencroff, whose hurrahs could have rivaled the detonations, "what do you say to our battery? All the pirates of the Pacific need only present themselves before Granite House! Not one will land here now without our permission!"

"If you take my advice, Pencroff," replied the engineer, "it's best not to try it."

"By the way," continued the sailor, "what about the six scoundrels who are prowling around the island? Are we going to let them run wild through our forests, our fields, our meadows? They are real jaguars, those pirates, and it seems to me that we should not hesitate to treat them as such? What do you think, Ayrton?" added Pencroff, turning to his companion.

Ayrton hesitated at first to answer, and Cyrus Smith regretted that Pencroff had asked him the question rather rashly. He was therefore deeply moved when Ayrton replied in a humble voice:

"I was one of those jaguars, Mr. Pencroff, and I have no right to speak..."

And he walked away slowly.

Pencroff had understood.

"What a damned fool I am!" he cried. "Poor Ayrton! He has just as much right to speak here as anyone else!"

"Yes," said Gideon Spilett, "but his reserve does him credit, and we should respect the feelings he has about his sad past."

"Understood, Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor, "and I won't do it again! I'd rather swallow my tongue than cause Ayrton any grief! But let's get back to the matter at hand. It seems to me that these bandits deserve no mercy and that we must rid the island of them as soon as possible."

"Is that your opinion, Pencroff?" asked the engineer.

— I completely agree.

— And before pursuing them mercilessly, wouldn't you wait until they had acted hostilely against us again?

"So what they did isn't enough?" asked Pencroff, who didn't understand these hesitations.

"They may return to other feelings!" said Cyrus Smith, "and perhaps repent..."

"Repent, them!" cried the sailor, shrugging his shoulders.

"Pencroff, think of Ayrton!" said Harbert, taking the sailor's hand. "He's become an honest man again!"

Pencroff looked at his companions one after the other. He would never have believed that his proposal should have aroused any hesitation. His harsh nature could not allow that anyone would compromise with the scoundrels who had landed on the island, with Bob Harvey's accomplices, the murderers of the speedy's crew, and he regarded them as wild beasts that had to be destroyed without hesitation or remorse.

"Well!" he said. "I have everyone against me! You want to be generous to these wretches! Fine. May we not regret it!"

"What danger do we face," said Harbert, "if we take care to be on our guard?"

"Hmm!" said the reporter, who wasn't making a definitive statement. "There are six of them, and they're well-armed. If each of them takes cover in a corner and shoots one of us, they'll soon be masters of the colony!"

"Why didn't they do it?" replied Harbert. "Probably because it wasn't in their interest to do so. Besides, there are six of us."

"Good! Good!" replied Pencroff, whom no amount of reasoning could convince. "Let these good people go about their business, and let's not think about them anymore!"

"Come now, Pencroff," said Nab, "don't be so mean! One of these wretches could be right here in front of you, within easy range of your rifle, and you wouldn't shoot him..."

"I would shoot him like a rabid dog, Nab," Pencroff replied coldly.

"Pencroff," said the engineer, "you have often shown great deference to my opinions. In this instance, will you still defer to me?"

"I will do as you please, Mr. Smith," replied the sailor, who was not at all convinced.

"Well, let's wait, and only attack if we are attacked."

Thus was decided the course of action to be taken towards the pirates, although Pencroff did not foresee anything good in it.

They wouldn't be attacked, but everyone would be on their guard. After all, the island was large and fertile. If some sense of honesty remained in their souls, these wretches might perhaps be able to mend their ways. Wasn't it in their best interest, given their circumstances, to rebuild their lives? In any case, if only out of humanity, they had to wait.

The colonists might no longer have the same freedom of movement they once did without suspicion.

Until then they had only had to watch out for wild beasts, and now six convicts, perhaps of the worst kind, were prowling around their island. It was serious, no doubt, and for less brave people it would have meant the loss of their safety.

Never mind! In the present, the settlers were right against Pencroff. Would they be right in the future? We shall see.

CHAPTER VI

However, the colonists' main concern was to carry out this complete exploration of the island, which had been decided upon, an exploration which would now have two goals: first, to discover the mysterious being whose existence was no longer in doubt, and, at the same time, to recognize what had become of the pirates, what retreat they had chosen, what life they were leading and what one might have to fear from them.

Cyrus Smith wished to depart without delay; but, as the expedition was expected to last several days, it seemed advisable to load the wagon with various camping equipment and utensils that would facilitate the organization of rest stops. However, at that moment, one

of the onaggas, wounded in the leg, could not be harnessed; he needed a few days of rest, and it was thought that the departure could be postponed for a week, that is, until November 20th, without any problem. November, at this latitude, corresponds to May in the northern hemisphere. It was therefore the height of summer. The sun was crossing the Tropic of Capricorn and providing the longest days of the year. The time would therefore be entirely favorable to the planned expedition, an expedition which, if it did not achieve its main goal, could be fruitful in discoveries, especially from the point of view of natural productions, since Cyrus Smith intended to explore these thick forests of the Far West, which extended to the end of the serpentine peninsula.

During the nine days preceding the departure, it was agreed that the final work on the Grande-vue plateau would be completed.

However, it was necessary for Ayrton to return to the corral, where the farm animals needed his attention. It was therefore decided that he would spend two days there and would not return to Granite House until he had thoroughly replenished the stables. Just as he was about to leave, Cyrus Smith asked him if he wanted one of them to accompany him, pointing out that the island was less safe than it had been.

Ayrton replied that it was unnecessary, that he would be sufficient for the task, and that, moreover, he had nothing to fear. If any incident

occurred at the corral or in the surrounding area, he would immediately notify the colonists by telegram to Granite House.

Ayrton therefore set off on the 9th at dawn, taking the wagon, harnessed to a single onagga, and, two hours later, the electric bell announced that he had found everything in order at the corral.

During those two days, Cyrus Smith worked on a project designed to permanently protect Granite House from any surprises. This involved completely concealing the upper opening of the old spillway, which was already bricked up and half-hidden under grass and plants, at the south corner of Grant Lake. Nothing could be simpler, as it only required raising the lake's water level by two to three feet, under which the opening would then be completely submerged.

To raise the water level, all that was needed was to build a dam at the two cuts made in the lake, which fed the Glycerine Creek and the Great Falls Creek. The settlers were invited to participate in this work, and the two dams, which, moreover, did not exceed seven or eight feet in width by three feet in height, were quickly erected using well-cemented blocks of rock.

With this work completed, it was impossible to suspect that at the tip of the lake there existed an underground conduit through which the excess water used to flow.

It goes without saying that the small diversion which served to supply the Granite-House reservoir and to operate the elevator had been carefully maintained, and that water would not be lacking under any circumstances.

Once the elevator was raised, this safe and comfortable retreat defied any surprise or helping hand.

This work had been quickly dispatched, and Pencroff, Gédéon Spilett and Harbert found the time to push on to Port-Ballon.

The sailor was very eager to know if the small cove at the bottom of which the Bonadventure was anchored had been visited by the convicts.

“Precisely,” he observed, “these gentlemen have landed on the southern coast, and if they have followed the coastline, it is to be feared that they have discovered the small port, in which case I would not give half a dollar of our Bonadventure.”

Pencroff's apprehensions were not entirely unfounded, and a visit to Port-Ballon seemed very opportune.

The sailor and his companions therefore set off in the afternoon of November 10th, and they were well armed. Pencroff, ostentatiously sliding two bullets into each barrel of his rifle, shook his head, which

did not bode well for anyone who approached him too closely, "beast or man," he said.

Gideon Spilett and Harbert also took their rifles, and, around three o'clock, all three left Granite-House.

Nab accompanied them to the bend of the Mercy, and, after they had crossed, he raised the bridge. It was agreed that a gunshot would signal the colonists' return, and that Nab, at that signal, would return to re-establish communication between the two banks of the river.

The small group advanced directly along the road from the port towards the island's southern coast. It was only three and a half miles, but it took Gideon Spilett and his companions two hours to cover it. They had also searched the entire edge of the road, both on the side of the dense forest and on the side of the shelduck marsh. They found no trace of the fugitives, who, no doubt, not yet knowing the number of colonists or the means of defense at their disposal, must have fled to the least accessible parts of the island.

Pencroff, having arrived at Port-Ballon, saw with extreme satisfaction the Bonadventure peacefully anchored in the narrow cove. Moreover, Port-Ballon was so well hidden amidst these high rocks that it could not be discovered from either the sea or the land, unless one was on it or inside it.

"Come now," said Pencroff, "those scoundrels haven't been here yet. Tall grass is better suited to reptiles, and it's obviously in the Far West that we'll find them again."

— And that's very fortunate, because if they had found the Bonadventure, added Harbert, they would have seized it to flee, which would have prevented us from returning to Tabor Island anytime soon.

"Indeed," replied the reporter, "it will be important to bring a document there that makes known the situation of Lincoln Island and Ayrton's new residence, in case the Scottish yacht comes to pick him up."

"Well, the Bonadventure is still here, Mr. Spilett!" replied the sailor. "He and his crew are ready to set sail at the first signal!"

“I think, Pencroff, that we can do it as soon as our expedition to the island is over. It’s possible, after all, that this unknown man, if we manage to find him, knows a great deal about both Lincoln Island and Tabor Island. Let’s not forget that he’s the undisputed author of the document, and he might even know what to expect on the yacht’s return!”

"Good heavens!" cried Pencroff, "who could it be? This fellow knows us, and we don't! If he's just a shipwrecked sailor, why is he hiding? We're good people, I suppose, and the company of good people is never

unpleasant! Did he come here willingly? Can he leave the island if he pleases? Is he still here? Is he no longer here?..."

While chatting, Pencroff, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett had embarked and were walking around the deck of the Bonadventure. Suddenly, the sailor, having examined the bollard on which the anchor cable was wound:

"Ah! For example!" he exclaimed. "That's quite something!"

— What is it, Pencroff? asked the reporter.

"The only thing is, I didn't tie that knot!"

And Pencroff pointed to a rope that secured the cable to the bollard itself, to prevent it from slipping.

"What, it wasn't you?" asked Gideon Spilett.

— No! I swear to it. This is a reef knot, and I usually make two half hitches.

— You were mistaken, Pencroff.

"I wasn't mistaken!" affirmed the sailor. "We have it in our hand, naturally, and the hand doesn't make mistakes!"

"So, the convicts came aboard then?" asked Harbert.

“I don’t know,” replied Pencroff, “but what is certain is that the anchor of the Bonadventure was raised and dropped again! And look! Here’s

further proof. The anchor cable was let out, and its fitting is no longer at the hawsehole portage. I repeat, our boat was used!”

— But if the convicts had used it, they would either have looted it, or they would have fled...

"Flee!... where to?... to Tabor Island?... replied Pencroff! Do you really think they would have risked it on a boat of such small tonnage?"

"Besides, we would have to admit that they were aware of the islet," replied the reporter.

"Be that as it may," said the sailor, "as sure as I am Bonadventure Pencroff of the Vineyard, our Bonadventure sailed without us!"

The sailor was so certain that neither Gideon Spilett nor Harbert could dispute his statement.

It was obvious that the boat had been moved, more or less, since Pencroff had brought it back to Port-Ballon. The sailor had no doubt that the anchor had been raised and then lowered again. But why these two maneuvers if the boat hadn't been used for some expedition?

"But how could we not have seen the Bonadventure pass by the island?" observed the reporter, keen to formulate all possible objections.

"Hey! Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor, "all you have to do is leave at night with a good breeze, and in two hours you'll be out of sight of the island!"

"Well," continued Gideon Spilett, "I ask again, for what purpose would the convicts have used the Bonadventure, and why, after using it, would they have brought it back to port?"

“Well, Mr. Spilett,” replied the sailor, “let’s put that among the inexplicable things and not dwell on it! The important thing was that the Bonadventure was there, and it is. Unfortunately, if the convicts were to take it a second time, it might not find itself where it belonged!”

"So, Pencroff," said Harbert, "perhaps it would be prudent to bring the Bonadventure back to Granite-House?"

"Yes and no," replied Pencroff, "or rather, no. The mouth of the Mercy is a bad place for a ship, and the sea is rough there."

— But by hauling it across the sand, right up to the foot of the chimneys?...

"Perhaps... yes..." replied Pencroff. "In any case, since we have to leave Granite-House for a rather long expedition, I believe the Bonadventure will be safer here during our absence, and we would do well to leave it here until the island is cleared of these scoundrels."

"That's also my opinion," said the reporter. "At least, in bad weather, it won't be exposed like it would be at the mouth of the Mercy."

"But what if the convicts went to visit him again!" said Harbert.

“Well, my boy,” replied Pencroff, “if they can’t find it here, they’ll quickly look for it near Granite House, and while we’re gone, nothing will stop them from seizing it! So I agree with Mr. Spilett that we should leave it at Port-Ballon. But when we get back, if we haven’t rid the island of those scoundrels, it would be wise to bring our boat back to Granite House until it’s no longer at risk of any unwanted visitors.”

"It's agreed. Let's go!" said the reporter.

Pencroff, Harbert, and Gideon Spilett, upon their return to Granite House, informed the engineer of what had transpired, and he approved their plans for the present and the future. He even promised the sailor that he would study the section of the canal between the islet and the shore to see if it might be possible to create an artificial harbor there using dams. In this way, the Bonadventure would always be within reach, under the colonists' watchful eyes, and, if necessary, under lock and key.

That same evening, a telegram was sent to Ayrton requesting that he bring back from the corral a pair of goats that Nab wanted to acclimatize to the plateau meadows. Oddly enough, Ayrton did not

acknowledge receipt of the telegram, as was his custom. This greatly surprised the engineer. But it was possible that Ayrton was not at the corral at that moment, or even that he was on his way back to Granite House. Indeed, two days had passed since his departure, and it had been decided that he would return on the evening of the 10th, or the morning of the 11th at the latest.

The colonists waited for Ayrton to appear on the heights of Grande-vue. Nab and Harbert even kept watch near the bridge, so they could lower it as soon as their companion appeared.

But, around ten o'clock in the evening, there was no mention of Ayrton. It was therefore deemed appropriate to send out a new telegram, requesting an immediate reply.

The Granite-House sound system remained silent.

The colonists were greatly worried. What had happened? Was Ayrton no longer at the corral, or, if he was still there, was he no longer free to move about? Should they go to the corral on this dark night?

They talked. Some wanted to leave, others wanted to stay.

"But," said Harbert, "perhaps some accident has occurred in the telegraph apparatus and it no longer works?"

"That's possible," said the reporter.

“Let’s wait until tomorrow,” replied Cyrus Smith. “It’s possible, in fact, that Ayrton hasn’t received our telegram, or even that we haven’t received his.”

We waited, and understandably, not without a certain amount of anxiety.

At the first light of day, — November 11, — Cyrus Smith was still sending the electric current through the wire and receiving no response.

He tried again: same result.

"On our way to the corral!" he said.

"And well-armed!" added Pencroff.

It was immediately decided that Granite-House would not remain alone and that Nab would stay there. After accompanying his companions to the glycerin creek, he would raise the bridge and, hidden behind a tree, watch for either their return or Ayrton's. Should the pirates appear and try to cross the passage, he would attempt to stop them with his rifle, and ultimately, he would take refuge in Granite-House, where, once the elevator was raised, he would be safe.

Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Harbert and Pencroff were to go directly to the corral, and, if they did not find Ayrton there, beat the woods in

the surrounding area.

At six o'clock in the morning, the engineer and his three companions had crossed the glycerin creek, and Nab positioned himself behind a slight shoulder crowned by a few large dragon trees, on the left bank of the stream.

The settlers, after leaving the Grande-vue plateau, immediately took the road to the corral.

They carried their rifles slung over their arms, ready to fire at the slightest sign of hostility. Both carbines and both shotguns were loaded with bullets. On either side of the road, the thicket was dense and could easily conceal criminals who, thanks to their weapons, would have been truly formidable.

The settlers walked quickly and silently. Top preceded them, sometimes running on the road, sometimes making a detour under the woods, but always silent and seeming to sense nothing unusual.

And they could count on the faithful dog not being caught off guard and barking at the slightest sign of danger. Along the road, Cyrus Smith and his companions followed the telegraph wire that connected the corral to Granite House. After walking for about two miles, they had not yet noticed any break in the line. The poles were in good condition, the booths intact, and the wire taut. However, from this point onward, the

engineer observed that the tension seemed less complete, and finally, upon reaching pole number 74, Harbert, who was in the lead, stopped, shouting, "The wire's broken!"

His companions quickened their pace and arrived at the place where the young boy had stopped.

There, the fallen pole lay across the road. The break in the wire was thus established, and it was clear that the dispatches from Granite-House could not have been received at the corral, nor those from the corral to Granite-House.

"It wasn't the wind that knocked down that post," Pencroff observed.

"No," replied Gideon Spilett. "The earth was dug out at his feet, and he was uprooted by human hands."

"Furthermore, the wire is broken," added Harbert, pointing to the two ends of the wire, which had been violently snapped.

"Is the break recent?" asked Cyrus Smith.

— Yes, replied Harbert, and the rupture certainly occurred only a short time ago.

"To the corral! To the corral!" cried the sailor.

The colonists were then halfway between Granite House and the corral. They still had two and a half miles to go. They broke into a run.

Indeed, there was reason to fear that some serious event might have occurred at the corral. No doubt Ayrton might have sent a telegram that hadn't arrived, and that wasn't the reason to worry his companions. But, more inexplicably, Ayrton, who had promised to return the previous evening, had not reappeared. Finally, it wasn't without reason that all communication between the corral and Granite House had been cut off, and who but the convicts had an interest in severing that communication?

The settlers ran, their hearts heavy with emotion. They had grown truly attached to their new companion. Would they find him struck down by the very hand of those he had once led?

Soon they reached the point where the road ran alongside the small stream that branched off from the red creek, irrigating the meadows of the corral. They slowed their pace, so as not to be out of breath when a fight might become necessary. Their rifles were no longer at rest, but loaded. Each man watched one side of the forest. Top let out a few low grunts that did not bode well. Finally, the palisaded enclosure appeared through the trees. There was no sign of damage. The gate was closed as usual. A profound silence reigned in the corral. Neither the usual bleating of the bighorn sheep nor Ayrton's voice could be heard.

"Let's go in!" said Cyrus Smith.

And the engineer advanced, while his companions, keeping watch twenty paces away from him, were ready to fire.

Cyrus Smith lifted the inner latch of the door, and was about to push back one of the leaves, when Top barked violently. A bang rang out above the fence, and a cry of pain answered it.

Harbert, struck by a bullet, lay on the ground!

CHAPTER VIII

At Harbert's cry, Pencroff, dropping his weapon, had rushed towards him.

"They killed him!" he cried. "Him, my child! They killed him!"

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett rushed towards Harbert. The reporter listened to see if the poor child's heart was still beating.

"He's alive," he said. "But he needs to be transported..."

"At Granite-House? That's impossible!" replied the engineer.

"To the corral, then!" cried Pencroff.

“One moment,” said Cyrus Harding.

And he darted to the left, making his way around the perimeter. There, he found himself face to face with a convict who, taking aim, shot him through the hat. A few seconds later, before he even had time to fire

his second shot, he fell, struck in the heart by Cyrus Smith's dagger, even more reliable than his rifle.

Meanwhile, Gideon Spilett and the sailor climbed to the corners of the palisade, scaled its top, jumped into the enclosure, knocked down the supports holding the gate from the inside, rushed into the empty house, and soon poor Harbert was lying on Ayrton's bed. A few moments later, Cyrus Smith was beside him.

Seeing Harbert lifeless, the sailor's grief was overwhelming. He sobbed, he wept, he wanted to smash his head against the wall. Neither the engineer nor the reporter could calm him. They were overcome with emotion. They couldn't speak.

However, they did everything in their power to save the poor child who was dying before their eyes. Gideon Spilett, after so many incidents that had marked his life, was not without some practical experience in medicine.

He knew a little about everything, and had already encountered many situations in which he had to treat wounds caused by either a bladed weapon or a firearm. Assisted by Cyrus Smith, he therefore provided the care that Harbert's condition required.

First of all, the reporter was struck by the general stupor that overwhelmed him, a stupor due either to hemorrhage or even to

concussion, if the bullet had hit a bone with enough force to cause a violent jolt.

Harbert was extremely pale, and his pulse was so weak that Gideon Spilett felt it beat only at long intervals, as if it were about to stop. At the same time, there was an almost complete resolution of the senses and the intellect. These symptoms were very serious.

Harbert's chest was exposed, and, the blood having been staunched with handkerchiefs, it was washed with cold water.

The bruise, or rather the bruised wound, appeared. An oval-shaped hole existed on his chest between the third and fourth ribs. That was where the bullet had struck Harbert.

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett then turned the poor child over, who let out such a faint whimper that it seemed as if it were his last breath. Another bruised wound bloodied Harbert's back, and the bullet that had struck him immediately escaped.

"Thank God!" said the reporter, "the bullet didn't stay in the body, and we won't have to remove it."

"But the heart?" asked Cyrus Smith.

— The heart wasn't touched, otherwise Harbert would be dead!

"Death!" cried Pencroff, who let out a roar!

The sailor had only heard the last words spoken by the reporter.

“No, Pencroff,” replied Cyrus Smith, “no! He is not dead. His pulse is still beating! He even uttered a groan. But, for your child’s sake, calm yourself. We need all our composure. Don’t let us lose it, my friend.”

Pencroff remained silent, but, a reaction taking place within him, large tears flooded his face.

However, Gideon Spilett tried to recall his memories and proceed methodically. Based on his observation, he had no doubt that the ball, having entered from the front, had exited from the rear.

But what havoc had this bullet caused in its passage? What vital organs were affected? That is something a professional surgeon could hardly have said at that moment, and even less so a reporter.

However, he knew one thing: he would have to prevent the inflammatory strangulation of the injured areas, and then combat the local inflammation and fever that would result from this wound—a potentially fatal wound! Now, what topical remedies, what anti-inflammatory agents should he use? By what means could he divert this inflammation? In any case, what was important was that both wounds be dressed without delay. Gideon Spilett did not deem it necessary to provoke further bleeding by washing them with warm water and

pressing on the lips. The hemorrhage had been very profuse, and Harbert was already far too weakened by the loss of blood.

The reporter therefore thought he should simply wash the two wounds with cold water.

Harbert was placed on the left side, and he was kept in that position.

"He must not move," said Gideon Spilett. "He is in the most favorable position for the wounds on his back and chest to suppurate comfortably, and absolute rest is necessary."

— What! We can't transport it to Granite-House? asked Pencroff.

— No, Pencroff, replied the reporter.

"Damn it!" cried the sailor, whose fist turned towards the sky.

— Pencroff!" said Cyrus Harding.

Gideon Spilett resumed his examination of the injured child with extreme care. Harbert was still so terribly pale that the reporter felt disturbed.

"Cyrus," he said, "I'm not a doctor... I'm terribly perplexed... I need your advice and experience to help me!"

"Restore your composure, my friend," replied the engineer, shaking the reporter's hand. "Judge with a cool head... think only of this: Harbert must be saved!"

These words restored to Gideon Spilett that sense of self-possession which, in a moment of discouragement, the keen feeling of his responsibility had caused him to lose. He sat down by the bed.

Cyrus Smith stood up. Pencroff had torn his shirt, and, mechanically, he was making shreds.

Gideon Spilett then explained to Cyrus Smith that he believed he should, first and foremost, stop the bleeding, but not close the two wounds, nor cause their immediate healing, because there had been an internal perforation and it was necessary not to let the suppuration accumulate in the chest.

Cyrus Smith fully approved, and it was decided that both wounds would be treated without attempting to close them immediately. Fortunately, it did not appear that they needed to be aggravated.

And now, to react against the inflammation that would occur, did the colonists possess an effective agent?

Yes! They had one, for nature had generously provided it. They had cold water, that is to say, the most powerful sedative that can be used against wound inflammation, the most effective therapeutic agent in serious cases, and which is now adopted by all physicians. Cold water also has the advantage of leaving the wound in complete rest and preserving it from any premature dressing, a considerable advantage,

since experience has shown that contact with air is disastrous during the first few days.

Gideon Spilett and Cyrus Smith reasoned with simple common sense, and they acted as the best surgeon would have. Cloth compresses were applied to poor Harbert's two wounds and had to be constantly soaked in cold water.

The sailor had first lit a fire in the fireplace of the dwelling, which lacked nothing for the necessities of life. Maple sugar and medicinal plants—the very same ones the young boy had gathered on the shores of Grant Lake—were used to make some refreshing herbal teas, which were given to him without his knowledge. His fever was extremely high, and the entire day and night passed without him regaining consciousness. Harbert's life hung by a thread, and that thread could break at any moment.

The next day, November 12, Cyrus Smith and his companions regained some hope. Harbert had recovered from his long stupor. He opened his eyes and recognized Cyrus Smith, the reporter, and Pencroff. He uttered two or three words. He didn't know what had happened. He was told, and Gideon Spilett begged him to rest completely, telling him that his life was not in danger and that his wounds would heal in a few days. Besides, Harbert was hardly suffering, and the cold water with

which they were constantly being doused was preventing any inflammation of the wounds. The suppuration was progressing steadily, the fever was not increasing, and it was hoped that this terrible injury would not lead to any catastrophe. Pencroff felt his heart gradually deflate. He was like a nun, like a mother at her child's bedside.

Harbert dozed off again, but his sleep seemed to be better.

"Tell me again that you have hope, Mr. Spilett!" said Pencroff. "Tell me again that you will save Harbert!"

"Yes, we will save him!" replied the reporter. "The wound is serious, and the bullet may even have passed through the lung, but the perforation of this organ is not fatal."

"God hear you!" repeated Pencroff.

As one might expect, for the twenty-four hours they had been at the corral, the colonists had had no other thought than to care for Harbert. They had given no thought to the danger that might threaten them if the convicts returned, nor to the precautions to take for the future.

But that day, while Pencroff kept vigil at the sick man's bedside, Cyrus Smith and the reporter discussed what should be done.

First, they searched the corral. There was no sign of Ayrton. Had the unfortunate man been dragged away by his former accomplices? Had

he been surprised by them in the corral? Had he fought and succumbed in the struggle? The latter seemed all too likely. Gideon Spilett, as he scaled the palisaded enclosure, had clearly seen one of the convicts fleeing up the southern spur of Mount Franklin, toward whom Top had rushed. It was one of those whose canoe had been wrecked on the rocks at the mouth of the Mercy River. Moreover, the man Cyrus Smith had killed, and whose body was found outside the enclosure, had indeed belonged to Bob Harvey's gang.

As for the corral, it had not yet suffered any damage. The gates were closed, and the livestock had not been able to scatter into the forest. Nor was there any sign of a struggle, any damage to the dwelling or the palisade.

However, the ammunition that Ayrton was supplied with had disappeared with him.

"The unfortunate man must have been taken by surprise," said Cyrus Smith, "and, as he was a man who could defend himself, he must have succumbed."

“Yes! That’s to be feared!” replied the reporter. “Then, no doubt, the convicts settled into the corral, where they found everything they needed in abundance, and they only fled when they saw us arrive. It’s

also quite clear that at that moment Ayrton, dead or alive, was no longer here.”

“We’ll have to clear the forest,” said the engineer, “and rid the island of these wretches.” Pencroff’s premonitions were right when he wanted them hunted down like wild beasts. That would have saved us a great deal of misfortune!

"Yes," replied the reporter, "but now we have the right to be ruthless!"

— In any case, said the engineer, we are forced to wait some time and remain in the corral until it is safe to transport Harbert to Granite-House.

"But Nab?" asked the reporter.

— Nab is safe.

— And what if, worried by our absence, he were to venture to come?

"He mustn't come!" replied Cyrus Smith sharply. "He'd be murdered on the way!"

— It's quite likely he'll try to join us!

— Ah! If the telegraph still worked, we could warn him! But it's impossible now! As for leaving Pencroff and Harbert alone here, we can't do that!... well, I'll go to Granite-House alone.

"No, no, Cyrus," replied the reporter, "you mustn't expose yourself! Your courage won't save you. Those wretches are obviously watching the corral; they're lying in ambush in the thick woods surrounding it, and if you were to leave, we would soon have two misfortunes to mourn instead of one!"

"But Nab?" the engineer repeated. "He hasn't heard from us in twenty-four hours! He'll want to come!"

"And since he will be even less on his guard than we ourselves would be," replied Gideon Spilett, "he will be struck down!"

"Isn't there any way to prevent it?"

While the engineer was thinking, his gaze fell on Top, who, pacing back and forth, seemed to be saying, "Aren't I here?"

"Top!" exclaimed Cyrus Smith.

The animal leaped up at its master's call.

"Yes, Top will go!" said the reporter, who had understood the engineer. "Top will go where we cannot! He will bring news from the corral to Granite House, and he will bring us back news from Granite House!"

"Quickly!" replied Cyrus Smith. "Quickly!"

Gideon Spilett quickly tore out a page from his notebook and wrote these lines on it:

"Harbert is wounded. We're at the corral. Be on your guard. Don't leave Granite House. Have the convicts appeared nearby? Answer by Top."

This laconic note contained everything Nab needed to learn and simultaneously asked him everything the colonists had an interest in knowing. It was folded and attached to Top's collar in a very conspicuous manner.

"Top! My dog," said the engineer, petting the animal, "Nab, Top! Nab! Go! Go!"

Top jumped up at these words. He understood, he guessed what was required of him. The road to the corral was familiar to him. In less than half an hour, he could have crossed it, and it was permissible to hope that where neither Cyrus Smith nor the reporter could have ventured without danger, Top, running through the grass or under the edge of the woods, would pass unnoticed.

The engineer went to the corral gate, and he pushed back one of the leaves.

"Nab! Top, Nab!" repeated the engineer once more, extending his hand in the direction of Granite-House.

Top darted outside and disappeared almost immediately.

"He will arrive!" said the reporter.

— Yes, and he will return, the faithful animal!

"What time is it?" asked Gideon Spilett.

— Ten o'clock.

"He could be here in an hour. We'll be watching for his return."

The corral gate was closed. The engineer and the reporter went back into the house. Harbert was fast asleep. Pencroff kept his compresses constantly moist.

Gideon Spilett, seeing that there was nothing to be done at the moment, busied himself with preparing some food, while carefully watching the part of the enclosure backing onto the buttress, through which an attack could occur.

The colonists waited anxiously for Top's return. Shortly before eleven o'clock, Cyrus Smith and the reporter, rifle in hand, were behind the door, ready to open it at the first bark from their dog. They had no doubt that if Top had arrived safely at Granite House, Nab would have sent him back immediately.

They had both been there for about ten minutes when a bang rang out and was immediately followed by repeated barking.

The engineer opened the door, and, seeing a remnant of smoke a hundred paces away in the woods, he fired in that direction.

Almost immediately Top leaped into the corral, the gate of which was quickly slammed shut.

"Top, Top!" cried the engineer, taking the dog's big, good-sized head in his arms. A note was tied around its neck, and Cyrus Smith read these words, written in Nab's large handwriting:

"No pirates in the vicinity of Granite-House. I'm not moving. Poor Mr. Harbert!"

CHAPTER VIII

So the convicts were still there, spying on the corral, determined to kill the settlers one after another! There was nothing left to do but treat them like wild beasts. But great precautions had to be taken, for these wretches had, at that moment, the advantage of the situation, seeing and not being seen, able to surprise with the suddenness of their attack and unable to be surprised themselves.

Cyrus Smith therefore arranged to live in the corral, whose supplies, moreover, could suffice for quite some time. Ayrton's house had been provided with everything necessary for life, and the convicts, frightened by the arrival of the colonists, had not had time to plunder it. It was

probable, as Gideon Spilett observed, that things had happened as follows: the six convicts, having landed on the island, had followed its southern coastline, and, after traversing the double shore of the serpentine peninsula, not being in the mood to venture into the woods of the Far West, they had reached the mouth of the river at the falls. Once they reached this point, going up the right bank of the stream, they arrived at the foothills of Mount Franklin, where it was natural for them to seek some refuge, and they soon discovered the corral, which was then uninhabited. There, they likely settled in while waiting for the moment to carry out their abominable plans.

Ayrton's arrival had surprised them, but they had managed to seize the unfortunate man, and... the rest was easy to guess!

Now the convicts — reduced to five, it is true, but well armed — were prowling in the woods, and venturing there meant exposing oneself to their blows, without any possibility of parrying or preventing them.

"Wait! There's nothing else to do!" Cyrus Smith kept repeating. "When Harbert is cured, we can organize a general manhunt for the island and deal with these convicts. That will be the purpose of our great expedition, at the same time..."

"The search for our mysterious protector," added Gideon Spilett, finishing the engineer's sentence. "Ah! It must be admitted, my dear

Cyrus, that this time his protection has failed us, and at the very moment when we needed it most!"

"Who knows!" replied the engineer.

"What do you mean?" asked the reporter.

"That we are not at the end of our troubles, my dear Spilett, and that the powerful intervention may yet have another opportunity to be exercised. But that is not the point. Harbert's life comes first."

This was the colonists' most grievous worry. A few days passed, and fortunately, the poor boy's condition had not worsened. Now, time gained against the illness was a great deal. The cold water, always kept at the right temperature, had completely prevented the wounds from becoming inflamed. It even seemed to the reporter that this slightly sulfurous water—explained by the proximity of the volcano—had a more direct effect on healing. The suppuration was much less profuse, and, thanks to the constant care he received, Harbert was returning to life, and his fever was beginning to subside. He was, moreover, on a strict diet, and consequently, his weakness was, and must have been, extreme; but he had plenty of herbal teas, and complete rest was doing him a world of good.

Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, and Pencroff had become quite adept at dressing the wounded young man. All the linen in the house had been

sacrificed. Harbert's wounds, covered with compresses and lint, were neither too tightly nor too loosely packed, so as to encourage healing without causing any inflammatory reaction. The reporter took extreme care with these dressings, fully aware of their importance, and repeated to his companions what most doctors readily acknowledge: that it is perhaps rarer to see a dressing done well than an operation performed well. After ten days, on November 22nd, Harbert was noticeably better. He had begun to eat some food. Color was returning to his cheeks, and his kind eyes smiled at his caregivers. He spoke a little, despite Pencroff's efforts, who talked constantly to prevent him from speaking and told the most improbable stories.

Harbert had questioned him about Ayrton, whom he was surprised not to see near him, thinking he must be at the corral. But the sailor, not wanting to upset Harbert, had simply replied that Ayrton had joined Nab to defend Granite House.

"Hey!" he said, "those pirates! These gentlemen have lost all respect! And Mr. Smith, trying to appeal to their emotions! I'll send them some sentiment, but in good quality lead!"

"And we haven't seen them again?" asked Harbert.

"No, my child," replied the sailor, "but we will find them again, and when you are healed, we will see if these cowards, who strike from

behind, will dare to attack us face to face!"

— I am still very weak, my poor Pencroff!

"Hey! Your strength will return little by little! What's a bullet through the chest? A mere joke! I've seen plenty of worse, and I'm none the worse for it!"

Finally, things seemed to be going well, and, as long as no complications arose, Harbert's recovery could be considered assured. But what would have been the colonists' situation if his condition had worsened, if, for example, the bullet had remained lodged in his body, if his arm or leg had had to be amputated!

"No," said Gideon Spilett more than once, "I have never thought of such a possibility without shuddering!"

"And yet," Cyrus Smith replied to him one day, "if action had been necessary, you would not have hesitated?"

“No, Cyrus!” said Gideon Spilett, “but thank God we were spared this complication!”

As in so many other situations, the colonists had relied on the simple logic of common sense that had served them so well so many times, and once again, thanks to their general knowledge, they had succeeded! But wouldn't the moment come when all their knowledge would fail them?

They were alone on this island. Yet, people complement each other through society; they are necessary to one another. Cyrus Smith knew this well, and sometimes he wondered if some circumstance might arise that they would be powerless to overcome!

It seemed to him, moreover, that he and his companions, hitherto so happy, had entered a disastrous period. For more than two and a half years since their escape from Richmond, everything had been going their way. The island had abundantly provided them with minerals, plants, and animals, and while nature had constantly blessed them, their science had known how to make the most of what it offered. The colony's material well-being was, so to speak, complete. Moreover, in certain circumstances, an inexplicable influence had come to their aid!... but all this could only last for a time!

In short, Cyrus Smith thought he realized that their luck seemed to be running out. Indeed, the convicts' ship had appeared in the island's waters, and while those pirates had been miraculously destroyed, six of them, at least, had escaped the catastrophe. They had landed on the island, and the five survivors were practically untraceable.

Ayrton had undoubtedly been massacred by those wretches, who possessed firearms, and, at the first use they made of them, Harbert had fallen, struck almost mortally. Were these then the first blows that

adverse fortune was dealing to the colonists? This is what Cyrus Smith wondered! This is what he often repeated to the reporter, and it also seemed to them that this strange, yet so effective, intervention, which had served them so well until then, was now failing them. Had this mysterious being, whoever it was, whose existence they could not deny, abandoned the island? Had it, in turn, succumbed?

There were no possible answers to these questions.

But let no one imagine that Cyrus Smith and his companion, because they talked about these things, were people to despair of! Far from it. They faced the situation squarely, they analyzed the chances, they prepared for every eventuality, they stood firm and upright before the future, and if adversity were finally to strike them, it would find in them men prepared to fight it.

CHAPTER IX

The young patient's convalescence was progressing steadily. Only one thing remained to be desired: that his condition would permit his return to Granite House. However well-furnished and provisioned the corral dwelling might be, it could not offer the comfort of a healthy granite home. Moreover, it did not provide the same security, and its occupants, despite their vigilance, were always under the threat of

gunfire from the convicts. There, on the contrary, in the midst of that impregnable and inaccessible massif, they would have nothing to fear, and any attempt against them would inevitably fail. They therefore eagerly awaited the moment when Harbert could be transported safely, and they were determined to carry out this transport, although communication through the jacamar woods was very difficult.

There was no news of Nab, but no cause for concern. The courageous Black man, well entrenched deep within Granite House, would not be caught unawares. Top had not been sent back to him, and it had seemed pointless to expose the faithful dog to a gunshot that would have deprived the colonists of their most useful ally.

So they waited, but the colonists were eager to be reunited at Granite House. It pained the engineer to see his forces divided, for it played right into the pirates' hands. Since Ayrton's disappearance, they were now only four against five, as Harbert could no longer count, and this was no small concern for the good fellow, who fully understood the predicament he was causing!

The question of how, under the present conditions, action would be taken against the convicts, was thoroughly discussed on November 29 between Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett and Pencroff, at a time when Harbert, who was dozing, could not hear them.

"My friends," said the reporter, "after discussing Nab and the impossibility of communicating with him, I believe, as you do, that venturing onto the road to the corral would risk being shot without being able to return fire. But don't you think that what should be done now is to frankly hunt down these wretches?"

“That’s what I was thinking,” replied Pencroff. “We’re not, I suppose, at the point of fearing a bullet, and, for my part, if Mr. Cyrus approves, I’m ready to throw myself into the forest! What the devil! One man is as good as another!”

"But is it worth five?" asked the engineer.

"I will join Pencroff," replied the reporter, "and both of them, well-armed, accompanied by Top..."

“My dear Spilett, and you, Pencroff,” Cyrus Smith continued, “let’s reason coldly. If the convicts were holed up somewhere on the island, if we knew where they were, and if it were simply a matter of flushing them out, I would understand a direct attack. But isn’t there reason to fear, on the contrary, that they are certain to fire the first shot?”

"Hey, Mr. Cyrus," cried Pencroff, "a bullet doesn't always go to its intended address!"

“The one that struck Harbert didn’t go astray, Pencroff,” replied the engineer. “Besides, mind you, if you both left the corral, I would remain

alone to defend it. Do you trust that the convicts won’t see you abandon it, that they won’t let you venture into the forest, and that they won’t attack it in your absence, knowing that there will be nothing left here but a wounded child and a man?”

“You’re right, Mr. Cyrus,” replied Pencroff, his chest simmering with anger, “you’re right. They’ll do anything to retake the corral, which they know is well-stocked! And you alone couldn’t hold out against them! Ah! If only we were at Granite House!”

“If we were at Granite House,” replied the engineer, “the situation would be very different! There, I wouldn’t hesitate to leave Harbert with one of us, and the other three could go and search the island’s forests. But we’re at the corral, and it’s best to stay here until we can all leave together!”

There was no answer to Cyrus Smith's arguments, and his companions understood this well.

"If only Ayrton were still with us!" said Gideon Spilett. "Poor man! His return to social life was short-lived!"

"If he's dead?" added Pencroff in a rather peculiar tone.

"So you expect, Pencroff, that those scoundrels spared him?" asked Gideon Spilett.

— Yes! If it was in their interest to do so!

— What! You would suppose that Ayrton, reuniting with his old accomplices, would forget everything he owes us...

"What do we know?" replied the sailor, who did not venture this unfortunate supposition without hesitation.

"Pencroff," said Cyrus Smith, taking the sailor's arm, "you have a bad thought there, and you would grieve me greatly if you persisted in speaking thus! I guarantee Ayrton's loyalty!"

"Me too," the reporter added quickly.

“Yes… yes!… Mr. Cyrus… I’m wrong,” replied Pencroff. “It was indeed a bad thought I had, and nothing justifies it! But what can you expect? I’m not quite myself anymore. This imprisonment in the corral is weighing on me terribly, and I’ve never been so agitated!”

"Be patient, Pencroff," replied the engineer.

— How soon, my dear Spilett, do you think it will be before Harbert can be transported to Granite-House?

“That’s hard to say, Cyrus,” replied the reporter, “because an imprudent action could have disastrous consequences. But his recovery is progressing steadily, and if he’s regained his strength in eight days, well, we’ll see!”

Eight days! That pushed back the return to Granite-House to the first days of December only.

At that time, spring was already two months old. The weather was fine, and the heat was beginning to intensify. The island's forests were in full leaf, and the time was approaching when the usual harvests would have to be gathered. The return to the Grande-vue plateau would therefore be followed by extensive agricultural work, interrupted only by the planned expedition to the island.

It is therefore understandable how much this confinement to the corral must have harmed the colonists. But if they were forced to submit to necessity, they did not do so without impatience. Once or twice, the reporter ventured onto the road and walked around the palisaded enclosure. Top accompanied him, and Gideon Spilett, his rifle loaded, was ready for anything.

He had no unpleasant encounters and found no suspicious traces. His dog would have warned him of any danger, and, as Top did not bark, it could be concluded that there was nothing to fear, at least for the moment, and that the convicts were occupied in another part of the island.

However, on his second outing, on November 27, Gideon Spilett, who had ventured into the woods for a quarter of a mile, in the south of the

mountain, noticed that Top smelled something.

The dog no longer had its indifferent air; it went back and forth, sniffing in the grass and bushes, as if its sense of smell had revealed some suspicious object.

Gideon Spilett followed Top, encouraging him and urging him on with his voice, all the while keeping a watchful eye, his rifle shouldered, and taking cover behind the trees. It was unlikely that Top had sensed the presence of a man, for in that case, he would have announced it with half-suppressed barks and a kind of muffled anger. But since he made no growling noise, the danger was neither imminent nor near.

About five minutes passed in this way, Top snooping around, the reporter following him cautiously, when, all of a sudden, the dog rushed towards a thick bush and pulled out a scrap of cloth.

It was a piece of clothing, stained and torn, which Gideon Spilett immediately brought back to the corral.

There, the colonists examined it, and they recognized that it was a piece of Ayrton's jacket, a piece of that felt made only in the Granite-House workshop.

"You see, Pencroff," observed Cyrus Smith, "there was resistance from the unfortunate Ayrton. The convicts dragged him along against his will! Do you still doubt his honesty?"

"No, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor, "and I have long since recovered from my momentary distrust! But there is, it seems to me, a consequence to be drawn from this fact."

"Which one?" asked the reporter.

— Ayrton wasn't killed in the corral! He was dragged away alive, since he resisted! And perhaps he's still alive!

"Perhaps indeed," replied the engineer, who remained thoughtful.

There was a glimmer of hope there, a hope Ayrton's companions could cling to. Indeed, they must have believed that, surprised in the corral, Ayrton had fallen to some bullet, as Harbert had. But if the convicts hadn't killed him outright, if they had taken him alive to some other part of the island, couldn't they admit that he was still their prisoner? Perhaps one of them had even recognized in Ayrton an old comrade from Australia, Ben Joyce, the leader of the escaped convicts? And who knows if they hadn't entertained the impossible hope of bringing Ayrton back to them!

It would have been so useful to them if they could have turned him into a traitor!

This incident was therefore favorably interpreted at the corral, and it no longer seemed impossible that Ayrton would be found. For his part, if he were only a prisoner, Ayrton would undoubtedly do everything to

escape the hands of these bandits, and he would be a powerful ally for the colonists!

"In any case," observed Gideon Spilett, "if, by some stroke of luck, Ayrton manages to escape, he will go straight to Granite House, because he does not know about the assassination attempt of which Harbert was a victim, and, consequently, he cannot believe that we are imprisoned in the corral."

“Ah! I wish he were there, at Granite House!” cried Pencroff, “and that we were there too! For if the scoundrels can do nothing against our home, at least they can ransack the plateau, our plantations, our farmyard!”

Pencroff had become a true farmer, devoted to his crops. But it must be said that Harbert was more eager than anyone to return to Granite House, for he knew how necessary the settlers' presence was there. And it was he who kept them at the corral! So this single thought occupied his mind: to leave the corral, to leave it at all costs! He believed he could endure the journey to Granite House. He was certain that his strength would return more quickly in his room, with the fresh air and the view of the sea!

Several times he urged Gideon Spilett, but the latter, fearing, with good reason, that Harbert's wounds, poorly healed, might reopen on

the way, did not give the order to leave.

However, an incident occurred which led Cyrus Smith and his two friends to give in to the young boy's desires, and heaven knows what pain and remorse that determination could cause them!

It was November 29th. It was seven o'clock in the morning. The three colonists were talking in Harbert's room when they heard Top barking loudly.

Cyrus Smith, Pencroff and Gideon Spilett grabbed their rifles, always ready to fire, and they left the house.

Top, having run to the foot of the palisaded enclosure, was jumping, barking, but it was contentment, not anger.

"Someone's coming!"

- Yes!

— He's not an enemy!

— Nab, maybe?

"Or Ayrton?"

No sooner had these words been exchanged between the engineer and his two companions than a body leaped over the palisade and fell back onto the corral floor.

It was Jup, Master Jup himself, to whom Top gave a truly friendly welcome!

"Jup!" cried Pencroff.

"Nab sent it to us!" said the reporter.

"Then," replied the engineer, "he must have some kind of banknote on him."

Pencroff rushed towards the orange. Obviously, if Nab had some important fact to inform his master, he could not employ a safer and faster messenger, who could pass where neither the colonists nor Top himself might have been able to.

Cyrus Smith had not been mistaken. A small bag hung from Jup's neck, and inside it was a note written in Nab's handwriting. Imagine the despair of Cyrus Smith and his companions when they read these words:

"Friday, 6 a.m. "Set invaded by convicts! "Nab."

They looked at each other without saying a word, then went back into the house. What should they do?

The convicts at the Grande-vue plateau, it was a disaster, devastation, ruin!

Harbert, seeing the engineer, the reporter and Pencroff return, understood that the situation had just worsened, and when he saw Jup, he no longer doubted that misfortune threatened Granite-House.

"Mr. Cyrus," he said, "I want to leave. I can handle the road! I want to leave!"

Gideon Spilett approached Harbert. Then, after looking at him.

"Let's go then!" he said.

The question was quickly settled as to whether Harbert would be transported on a stretcher or in the wagon that Ayrton had brought to the corral. The stretcher would have been gentler for the wounded man, but it required two bearers, meaning the defense would be without two rifles if an attack occurred en route.

Couldn't, on the contrary, by using the cart, all arms be left free? Was it therefore impossible to place the mattresses on which Harbert was resting and to advance with such care that any shock to him was avoided? It could be done.

The cart was brought. Pencroff hitched the onagga to it.

Cyrus Smith and the reporter lifted Harbert's mattresses and placed them on the bottom of the wagon between the two side rails.

The weather was beautiful. Bright rays of sunlight slid through the trees.

"Are the weapons ready?" asked Cyrus Smith.

They were. The engineer and Pencroff, each armed with a double-barreled rifle, and Gideon Spilett, holding his carbine, had nothing left to do but leave.

"Are you alright, Harbert?" asked the engineer.

“Ah, Mr. Cyrus,” replied the young boy, “don’t worry, I won’t die on the way!”

Speaking in this way, one could see that the poor child was summoning all his energy, and that, by a supreme will, he was holding back his strength which was about to be extinguished.

The engineer felt his heart clench painfully.

He hesitated for a while before giving the signal to leave. But that would have driven Harbert to despair, perhaps even killed him.

“On the way!” said Cyrus Harding.

The corral gate was opened. Jup and Top, who knew when to keep quiet, rushed forward. The wagon came out, the gate was closed, and the onagga, led by Pencroff, advanced slowly.

Admittedly, it would have been better to take a different route than the one that went directly from the corral to Granite House, but the wagon would have had great difficulty moving through the woods. Therefore, this route had to be followed, even though it must have been known to the convicts.

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett walked on either side of the wagon, ready to respond to any attack. However, it was unlikely the convicts had yet abandoned the Great View plateau. Nab's note had evidently been written and sent as soon as the convicts had appeared there. Now, this note was dated six o'clock in the morning, and the agile orange-clad dog, accustomed to frequenting the corral, had taken barely three-quarters of an hour to cover the five miles separating him from Granite House. The road should therefore be safe at this moment, and if there were to be any firing, it would most likely only be in the vicinity of Granite House.

However, the settlers remained extremely vigilant. Top and Jup, the latter armed with his stick, sometimes in front, sometimes beating the wood on the sides of the path, signaled no danger.

The wagon moved slowly forward, under Pencroff's direction. It had left the corral at half past seven. An hour later, four out of five miles had been covered, without any incident.

The road was deserted, as was all of that section of jacamar forest that stretched between the Mercy River and the lake. No alarm was raised. The thickets seemed as deserted as the day the settlers landed on the island.

They were approaching the plateau. One more mile, and they would see the culvert of the Glycerin Creek. Cyrus Smith had no doubt that this culvert was in place, either because the convicts had entered through this point, or because, after crossing one of the streams that enclosed the area, they had taken the precaution of lowering it to create a refuge. Finally, the gap in the last trees revealed the sea horizon. But the wagon continued on its way, for none of its defenders could think of abandoning it. At that moment, Pencroff stopped the onagga, and in a terrible voice:

"Ah! The wretches!" he cried.

And with his hand he pointed to thick smoke swirling above the mill, the stables and the farm buildings. A man was moving about in the midst of these vapors.

It was Nab.

His companions cried out. He heard them and ran towards them...

The convicts had abandoned the plateau about half an hour ago, after having devastated it!

"And Mr. Harbert?" cried Nab.

Gideon Spilett returned to the wagon at that moment.

Harbert had lost consciousness!

CHAPTER X

Convicts, the dangers threatening Granite House, the ruins covering the plateau—these were no longer mentioned. Harbert's condition dominated everything. Had the transport been fatal, causing some internal injury? The reporter couldn't say, but he and his companions were in despair.

The wagon was brought to the bend in the river. There, some branches, arranged in the form of a stretcher, received the mattresses on which the unconscious Harbert lay. Ten minutes later, Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, and Pencroff were at the foot of the wall, leaving Nab to take the wagon back up to the plateau of Grande-vue.

The elevator was set in motion, and soon Harbert was lying on his bunk in Granite-House.

The care he received brought him back to life. He smiled for a moment upon finding himself in his room, but he could barely murmur a few words, so great was his weakness.

Gideon Spilett examined his wounds. He feared they might have reopened, being imperfectly healed... but that was not the case.

So where did this prostration come from? Why had Harbert's condition worsened?

The young boy was then overcome by a sort of feverish sleep, and the reporter and Pencroff remained near his bed.

Meanwhile, Cyrus Smith was filling Nab in on what had happened at the corral, and Nab was telling his master about the events that had just taken place on the plateau.

It was only the previous night that the convicts had appeared at the edge of the forest, near the Glycerine Creek. Nab, who was keeping watch near the farmyard, hadn't hesitated to fire at one of these pirates as he prepared to cross the stream; but, in the rather dark night, he hadn't been able to tell if the wretch had been hit. In any case, it hadn't been enough to drive the gang away, and Nab only had time to make his way back to Granite House, where he was, at least, safe.

But what to do then? How to prevent the devastation the convicts threatened the plateau with? Did Nab have any way of warning his master? And besides, what situation did the corral's inhabitants themselves find?

Cyrus Smith and his companions had left on November 11th, and it was now the 29th. For nineteen days, Nab had received no news other than what Top had brought him, disastrous news indeed: Ayrton missing, Harbert gravely wounded, the engineer, the reporter, the sailor —all, so to speak, imprisoned in the corral! What to do? poor Nab wondered. As for himself, he had nothing to fear, for the convicts couldn't reach him in Granite House.

But the buildings, the plantations, all these improvements at the mercy of the pirates! Wouldn't it have been better to let Cyrus Smith decide what he should do and at least warn him of the danger that threatened him?

Nab then had the idea of using Jup and entrusting him with a note. He knew the orang's extreme intelligence, which had often been tested. Jup understood the word "corral," which had often been spoken in his presence, and it was even remembered that he had often driven the wagon there with Pencroff. Day had not yet broken. The agile orang would easily be able to pass unnoticed in these woods, of which the convicts, moreover, should consider him one of the natural inhabitants.

Nab did not hesitate. He wrote the note, tied it around Jup's neck, brought the monkey to the door of Granite-House, from which he let a

long rope unspool to the ground; then, several times, he repeated these words:

"Jup! Jup! Corral! Corral!"

The animal understood, grabbed the rope, slid quickly to the shore and disappeared into the shadows, without the convicts' attention being aroused in any way.

"You did the right thing, Nab," replied Cyrus Smith, "but perhaps you would have done even better by not warning us!"

And, as he spoke, Cyrus Smith was thinking of Harbert, whose transport seemed to have so seriously compromised his convalescence.

Nab finished his story. The convicts had not appeared on the shore. Not knowing the number of inhabitants on the island, they could assume that Granite House was defended by a large force. They must have remembered that, during the brig attack, they had been met with numerous shots from both the lower and upper rocks, and, no doubt, they did not want to expose themselves. But the plateau of Grande-vue lay open to them and was not covered by Granite House's fire. There, they gave free rein to their predatory instincts, pillaging, burning, doing evil for evil's sake, and they only withdrew half an hour before the arrival of the colonists, whom they must have believed were still confined to the corral.

Nab had rushed out of his hiding place. He had gone back up onto the plateau, at the risk of being hit by a bullet, he had tried to extinguish the fire that was consuming the buildings of the lower courtyard, and he had fought, but in vain, against the fire, until the moment the wagon appeared on the edge of the woods.

Such were these grave events. The presence of the convicts constituted a permanent threat to the colonists of Lincoln Island, hitherto so happy, and who could expect even greater misfortunes!

Gideon Spilett remained at Granite-House near Harbert and Pencroff, while Cyrus Smith, accompanied by Nab, went to judge for himself the extent of the disaster.

He was glad the convicts hadn't advanced as far as Granite House. The chimney workshops wouldn't have escaped devastation. But, after all, that damage might have been easier to repair than the ruins piled up on the Grande-vue plateau!

Cyrus Smith and Nab headed towards the Mercy and followed its left bank upstream, finding no trace of the convicts' passage. On the other side of the river, deep in the woods, they also saw no suspicious signs.

Moreover, here is what could be admitted, in all probability: either the convicts knew of the return of the settlers to Granite-House, because they had been able to see them pass on the road to the corral; or, after

the devastation of the plateau, they had gone deep into the jacamar wood, following the course of the Mercy, and they were unaware of this return.

In the first case, they had to return to the corral, now without defenders, and which contained valuable resources for them.

In the second instance, they had to return to their camp and wait there for some opportunity to resume the attack.

It would therefore be advisable to warn them; but any undertaking aimed at ridding the island of them was still contingent on the situation at Harbert. Indeed, Cyrus Smith needed all his strength, and no one could leave Granite House at that moment.

The engineer and Nab arrived on the plateau. It was a scene of desolation. The fields had been trampled. The ears of grain, ready for harvest, lay scattered on the ground. The other crops had suffered no less. The vegetable garden was in ruins.

Fortunately, Granite-House possessed a reserve of seeds that allowed them to repair this damage.

As for the mill and the farmyard buildings, the onaggas' stable, the fire had destroyed everything. A few frightened animals roamed across the plateau. The birds, which had taken refuge on the lake's waters

during the fire, were already returning to their usual spots and paddling along the banks. There, everything would have to be rebuilt.

Cyrus Smith's face, paler than usual, denoted an inner anger that he did not easily control, but he did not utter a word.

One last time he looked at his devastated fields, the smoke still rising from the ruins, then he returned to Granite-House.

The days that followed were the saddest the colonists had yet experienced on the island! Harbert's weakness was visibly increasing. It seemed that a more serious illness, a consequence of the profound physiological disturbance he had suffered, threatened to manifest itself, and Gideon Spilett sensed such a deterioration in his condition that he would be powerless to combat it! Indeed, Harbert remained in a sort of almost continuous drowsiness, and some symptoms of delirium began to appear. Refreshing herbal teas were the only remedies available to the colonists. The fever was not yet very high, but soon it seemed to be establishing itself in regular bouts.

Gideon Spilett recognized him on December 6th. The poor child, whose fingers, nose, and ears became extremely pale, was first seized by slight shivers, chills, and trembling.

His pulse was weak and irregular, his skin dry, his thirst intense. This was soon followed by a period of heat; his face became animated, his

skin reddened, his pulse quickened; then profuse sweating set in, after which the fever seemed to subside. The attack had lasted about five hours.

Gideon Spilett had not left Harbert, who was now suffering from an intermittent fever, that much was all too certain, and this fever had to be stopped at all costs before it became more serious.

"And to cut it," said Gideon Spilett to Cyrus Smith, "you need a fever reducer.

"A fever reducer!" replied the engineer. "We have neither cinchona bark nor quinine sulfate!"

"No," said Gideon Spilett, "but there are willows on the edge of the lake, and willow bark can sometimes be used as a substitute for quinine."

"Let's try it without wasting a moment!" replied Cyrus Smith.

Willow bark, in fact, was rightly considered a substitute for quinine, as were horse chestnut, holly leaf, serpentaria, etc. It was obviously necessary to try this substance, although it was not as good as quinine, and to use it in its natural state, since the means were lacking to extract the alkaloid, that is to say salicin.

Cyrus Smith himself went and cut some pieces of bark from the trunk of a kind of black willow; he brought them back to Granite-House, ground them into powder, and this powder was administered that same evening to Harbert.

The night passed without serious incidents. Harbert had some delirium, but the fever did not reappear during the night, nor did it return the following day.

Pencroff regained some hope. Gideon Spilett said nothing. It was possible that the episodes wouldn't be daily, that the fever would be tertian, in short, and that it would return the next day. And so, that next day was awaited with the keenest anxiety.

It could also be observed that, during the afebrile period, Harbert remained as if broken, with a heavy head and prone to dizziness. Another symptom that terrified the reporter was that Harbert's liver was beginning to become congested, and soon a more intense delirium demonstrated that his brain was also malfunctioning.

Gideon Spilett was appalled by this new complication. He took the engineer aside.

"It's a pernicious fever!" he told him.

"A pernicious fever!" cried Cyrus Smith. "You're mistaken, Spilett. A pernicious fever doesn't appear spontaneously. You have to have had

the germ!"

“I’m not mistaken,” replied the reporter. “Harbert must have contracted the virus in the island’s marshes, and that’s enough. He’s already had one attack. If a second attack occurs, and if we can’t prevent a third… he’s doomed!”

— But this willow bark?...

"It's insufficient," replied the reporter, "and a third attack of pernicious fever that isn't stopped with quinine is always fatal!"

Fortunately, Pencroff hadn't heard anything of this conversation. He would have gone mad.

We can understand the anxieties of the engineer and the reporter during that day of November 7th and during the night that followed.

Around midday, the second attack occurred. The crisis was terrible. Harbert felt lost! He reached out to Cyrus Smith, to Spilett, to Pencroff! He didn't want to die!... this scene was heart-rending. Pencroff had to be moved away.

The access lasted five hours. It was obvious that Harbert wouldn't be able to withstand a third.

The night was dreadful. In his delirium, Harbert said things that broke his companions' hearts! He rumbled, he fought against the convicts, he

called out to Ayrton! He begged this mysterious being, this protector, now gone, whose image haunted him... Then he would fall back into a deep prostration that completely destroyed him... Several times, Gideon Spilett thought the poor boy was dead!

The following day, December 8th, was nothing but a succession of weaknesses. Harbert's emaciated hands clenched his sheets. He had been given more doses of crushed bark, but the reporter no longer expected any results from them.

"If we haven't given him a stronger fever reducer by tomorrow morning," said the reporter, "Harbert will be dead!"

Night fell—no doubt the last night of this brave, kind, intelligent child, so far ahead of his age, and whom everyone loved like their own son! The only remedy that existed against this terrible, pernicious fever, the only specific one that could conquer it, was not found on Lincoln Island!

During the night of December 8th to 9th, Harbert was seized by a more intense delirium. His liver was horribly congested, his brain attacked, and it was already impossible for him to recognize anyone.

Would he live until the next day, until that third attack which was bound to take him? It was no longer likely. His strength was exhausted, and, in the intervals between attacks, he was as if inanimate.

Around three o'clock in the morning, Harbert let out a terrifying cry. He seemed to writhe in a final convulsion. Nab, who was near him, terrified, rushed into the next room, where his companions were keeping watch!

Top, right now, is barking in a strange way...

They all returned immediately and managed to restrain the dying child, who wanted to throw himself out of bed, while Gideon Spilett, taking his arm, felt his pulse gradually return...

It was five o'clock in the morning. The rays of the rising sun were beginning to filter into the rooms of Granite House. It was shaping up to be a beautiful day, and this day would be poor Harbert's last!... a ray of sunlight reached the table that was placed near the bed.

Suddenly, Pencroff, letting out a cry, pointed to an object placed on the table... it was a small oblong box, the lid of which bore these words: quinine sulfate.

CHAPTER XI

Gideon Spilett took the box and opened it. It contained about two hundred grains of a white powder, a few particles of which he brought to his lips. The extreme bitterness of this substance could not deceive

him. It was indeed the precious alkaloid of cinchona, the antiperiodic par excellence.

Harbert had to be given this powder without hesitation. How it got there would be discussed later.

“Coffee,” asked Gédéon Spilett.

A few moments later, Nab brought a cup of the lukewarm infusion. Gideon Spilett threw in about eighteen grains of quinine, and they managed to get Harbert to drink this mixture.

There was still time, because the third attack of the pernicious fever had not yet manifested itself!

And, it may be added, he was not supposed to come back!

Moreover, it must be said, everyone had regained hope. The mysterious influence had been exerted once more, and at a supreme moment, when all hope was lost! After a few hours, Harbert was resting more peacefully. The colonists were then able to discuss the incident. The stranger's intervention was more evident than ever. But how had he managed to get into Granite House during the night?

It was absolutely inexplicable, and, in truth, the way in which the "genius of the island" proceeded was no less strange than the genius itself.

During that day, and at approximately three-hour intervals, quinine sulfate was administered to Harbert.

Harbert felt some improvement the very next day. Certainly, he wasn't cured, and intermittent fevers are prone to frequent and dangerous relapses, but he received ample care. And besides, the specific remedy was there, and not far away, no doubt, the one he had brought with him! Finally, immense hope returned to everyone's hearts.

This hope was not in vain. Ten days later, on December 20th, Harbert began his convalescence. He was still weak, and a strict diet had been imposed on him, but no attacks had returned. And besides, the docile child so readily submitted to all the prescriptions given to him! He so longed to get better!

Pencroff was like a man pulled from the bottom of an abyss. He had fits of joy bordering on delirium. After the third episode had passed, he hugged the reporter so tightly he could barely breathe. From then on, he called him nothing but Doctor Spilett.

The real doctor still had to be discovered.

"We'll find out!" the sailor kept repeating.

And certainly, this man, whoever he was, should have expected some rough embrace from the worthy Pencroff!

December ended, and with it the year 1867, during which the settlers of Lincoln Island had just endured such hardship. They entered 1868 with magnificent weather, superb warmth, a tropical temperature, which the sea breeze thankfully cooled.

Harbert was reborn, and from his bed, placed near one of the windows of Granite-House, he breathed in the healthy air, laden with salty emanations, which restored his health. He began to eat, and heaven knows what delicious little dishes, light and tasty, Nab prepared for him!

"It made you wish you had been dying!" said Pencroff.

Throughout this entire period, the convicts had not once been seen near Granite House. There was no news of Ayrton, and while the engineer and Harbert still held some hope of finding him, their companions no longer doubted that the unfortunate boy had perished. However, these uncertainties could not continue, and as soon as the young man was able to recover, the expedition, whose outcome was to be so important, would be undertaken. But they would have to wait perhaps a month, for it would take all the colony's forces to overcome the convicts.

Moreover, Harbert was getting better and better. The liver congestion had disappeared, and the wounds could be considered to have healed

completely.

During January, significant work was carried out on the Grande-vue plateau; however, it consisted solely of salvaging what could be saved of the devastated crops, both wheat and vegetables. Seeds and seedlings were collected to provide a new harvest for the next growing season.

As for raising the buildings in the farmyard, the mill, the stables, Cyrus Smith preferred to wait.

While he and his companions pursued the convicts, the latter might well return to the plateau, and they could not be given any reason to resume their life of pillaging and arson. Once the island had been cleared of these evildoers, they would begin rebuilding.

The young convalescent had begun to get up in the second half of January, first for an hour a day, then two, then three. His strength was returning visibly, so vigorous was his constitution. He was eighteen years old then. He was tall and promised to become a man of noble and handsome bearing.

From that moment on, his convalescence, while still requiring some care — and Dr. Spilett was very strict — progressed steadily.

Towards the end of the month, Harbert was already exploring the Grande-vue plateau and the beaches. A few swims in the sea, which he took with Pencroff and Nab, did him a world of good. Cyrus Smith felt

he could already announce the departure date, which was set for February 15th. The nights, very clear at that time of year, would be ideal for the searches that needed to be carried out all over the island.

The preparations required for this exploration were thus begun, and they were to be extensive, for the colonists had sworn not to return to Granite House until their twofold objective had been achieved: firstly, to destroy the convicts and find Ayrton, if he was still alive; secondly, to discover the one who presided so effectively over the colony's destiny. From Lincoln Island, the colonists knew thoroughly the entire eastern coast from Cape Claw to the Mandible Capes, the vast shelduck marshes, the area around Grant Lake, the jacamar woods between the Corral Road and the Mercy River, the courses of the Mercy and Red Creek Rivers, and finally the foothills of Mount Franklin, between which the corral had been established.

They had explored, but only imperfectly, the vast coastline of Washington Bay from Cape Claw to Reptile's Headland, the forested and marshy edge of the west coast, and those endless dunes that ended at the half-open mouth of Shark's Gulf.

But they had in no way recognized the large wooded areas that covered the serpentine peninsula, the entire right bank of the Mercy River, the left bank of the Falls River, and the tangle of foothills and

counter-valleys that supported three-quarters of the base of Mount Franklin to the west, north, and east, where so many deep retreats undoubtedly existed. Consequently, several thousand acres of the island had still escaped their investigations.

It was therefore decided that the expedition would proceed across the Far West, so as to encompass the entire area to the right of the Mercy.

Perhaps it would have been better to head first for the corral, where it was feared the convicts might have taken refuge again, either to plunder it or to settle there. But either the devastation of the corral was now a fait accompli, and it was too late to prevent it, or the convicts had had an interest in entrenching themselves there, and there would still be time to go and force them out of their retreat.

So, after discussion, the first plan was maintained, and the settlers resolved to reach the Reptile's Headland through the woods. They would move forward with axes and thus lay the first trace of a road that would connect Granite House and the tip of the peninsula, over a length of sixteen to seventeen miles.

The cart was in perfect condition. The onaggas, well rested, could provide a long milking.

Provisions, camping equipment, a portable kitchen, and various utensils were loaded onto the wagon, along with weapons and

ammunition carefully selected from Granite House's now extensive arsenal. But it was crucial to remember that the convicts might be roaming the woods, and that in the midst of those dense forests, a shot could be fired and received in an instant. Hence, the necessity for the small group of settlers to remain united and not divide under any circumstances.

It was also decided that no one would remain at Granite House. Top and Jup themselves were to be part of the expedition. The inaccessible dwelling could remain unattended.

February 14th, the day before departure, was a Sunday.

He was entirely devoted to rest and sanctified by the thanksgivings that the colonists offered to the Creator. Harbert, fully healed but still a little weak, would have a reserved place on the wagon.

The following day, at daybreak, Cyrus Smith took the necessary steps to secure Granite House against any invasion. The ladders that had once been used for the ascent were brought to the chimneys and buried deep in the sand so that they could be used for the descent, as the elevator drum had been dismantled, and nothing remained of the apparatus. Pencroff was the last to stay in Granite House to complete this task, and he descended by means of a rope, the other end of which was secured

below. Once brought down to the ground, this rope completely severed all communication between the upper landing and the beach.

The weather was magnificent.

"A hot day is in store!" said the reporter cheerfully.

"Bah! Doctor Spilett," replied Pencroff, "we will walk in the shade of the trees and we won't even see the sun!"

"Let's go!" said the engineer.

The wagon was waiting on the shore, in front of the chimneys. The reporter had demanded that Harbert take his place in it, at least for the first few hours of the journey, and the young boy had to comply with his doctor's orders.

Nab took the lead of the group. Cyrus Smith, the reporter, and the sailor went first. Top skipped along happily. Harbert had offered Jup a ride in his vehicle, and Jup had accepted without hesitation. The time to leave had arrived, and the small group set off.

The wagon first turned the angle of the mouth, then, after going up the left bank of the Mercy for a mile, it crossed the bridge at the end of which the road to Port Ballon began, and there the explorers, leaving this road on their left, began to penetrate under the cover of those immense woods which formed the Far West region.

For the first two miles, the widely spaced trees allowed the wagon to move freely; from time to time it was necessary to cut through some vines and thickets of brush, but no serious obstacle stopped the progress of the settlers.

The thick canopy of trees cast a cool shade on the ground. Deodar, Douglas fir, casuarina, banksia, gum trees, dragon trees, and other familiar species stretched as far as the eye could see. The island's usual birdlife was all there: grouse, jacamar, pheasant, lorikeet, and the entire chattering family of cockatoos, parakeets, and parrots. Agoutis, kangaroos, and capybaras darted among the grasses, and all of this reminded the settlers of their first excursions upon arriving on the island.

“However,” Cyrus Smith observed, “I notice that these animals, both quadrupeds and birds, are more timid than before. These woods have therefore recently been traversed by the convicts, whose traces we must certainly find.”

And indeed, in many places, one could recognize the more or less recent passage of a group of men: here, broken branches in the trees, perhaps to mark the path; there, ashes from an extinguished hearth, and footprints preserved in certain clayey patches of soil. But, all in all, nothing that appeared to belong to a permanent encampment.

The engineer had advised his companions to refrain from hunting. The gunshots might have alerted the convicts, who could perhaps be prowling in the forest. Besides, the hunters would necessarily have been led some distance from the wagon, and walking alone was strictly forbidden.

In the second part of the day, about six miles from Granite House, travel became quite difficult. In order to get through some thickets, trees had to be cut down and a path made. Before venturing onto it, Cyrus Smith made sure to send Top and Jup into these dense undergrowth, who conscientiously carried out their mission, and when the dog and the orange-clad dog returned without having reported anything, it meant there was nothing to fear, neither from the convicts nor from the wild beasts—two kinds of individuals in the animal kingdom whose ferocious instincts placed them on the same level.

On the evening of that first day, the colonists camped about nine miles from Granite-House, on the bank of a small tributary of the Mercy, whose existence they were unaware of, and which must have been connected to the hydrographic system to which this soil owed its astonishing fertility.

They ate a hearty supper, for the colonists' appetites were greatly whetted, and measures were taken to ensure that the night would pass

without incident. If the engineer had only been dealing with ferocious animals, jaguars or the like, he would simply have lit fires around his camp, which would have been sufficient for its defense; but the convicts would have been more likely to be attracted than deterred by these flames, and in that case, it was better to surround oneself with deep darkness.

The surveillance was, moreover, strictly organized. Two of the colonists had to keep watch together, and it was agreed that they would be relieved every two hours by their companions. However, since Harbert was excused from guard duty despite his protests, Pencroff and Gideon Spilett, on the one hand, and the engineer and Nab, on the other, took turns standing guard near the camp.

Moreover, there were barely a few hours of night.

The darkness was due more to the thickness of the branches than to the disappearance of the sun. The silence was barely disturbed by the raucous howls of jaguars and the snickers of monkeys, which seemed to particularly annoy Master Jup.

The night passed without incident, and the next day, February 16, the march, rather slow than arduous, was resumed through the forest.

That day, they could only cover six miles, because at every moment they had to clear a path with an axe. True "setlers," the colonists spared

the large and beautiful trees, the felling of which, moreover, would have cost them enormous fatigue, and they sacrificed the small ones; but as a result, the road took a rather unstraight direction and was lengthened by numerous detours.

During that day, Harbert discovered new species, whose presence had not yet been recorded on the island, such as tree ferns with drooping fronds that seemed to overflow like the waters of a basin, and carob trees, whose long pods the onaggas eagerly grazed, yielding sweet pulp of excellent taste. There, the settlers also found magnificent kauri trees, arranged in groups, their cylindrical trunks crowned with a cone of greenery, rising to a height of two hundred feet. These were indeed the kings of New Zealand, as famous as the cedars of Lebanon.

As for the wildlife, it offered no new specimens beyond those the hunters had previously encountered. However, they caught a glimpse of, but were unable to approach, a pair of those large birds peculiar to Australia, a type of cassowary called emus, which, standing five feet tall and brown in plumage, belong to the order of wading birds. Top darted after them with all the speed of his four legs, but the cassowaries easily outran him, so prodigious was their speed.

As for the traces left by the convicts in the forest, a few more were found. Near a fire that appeared to have been recently extinguished, the

colonists noticed some footprints, which were examined with extreme care. By measuring them one after the other according to their length and width, the footprints of five men were easily identified. The five convicts had evidently camped in this spot; but—and this was the object of such meticulous examination!—a sixth footprint could not be discovered, which, in that case, would have been Ayrton's.

"Ayrton wasn't with them!" said Harbert.

"No," replied Pencroff, "and if he wasn't with them, it's because those wretches had already killed him! Don't those scoundrels have a den where we can hunt them down like tigers?"

"No," replied the reporter. "It is more likely that they will go on an adventure, and it is in their interest to wander like this until they are masters of the island."

"Masters of the island!" cried the sailor. "Masters of the island!..." he repeated, and his voice was strangled as if an iron wrist had seized him by the throat.

Then, in a calmer tone:

"Do you know, Mr. Cyrus," he said, "what bullet I've loaded into my rifle?"

— No, Pencroff!

"That's the ball that went through Harbert's chest, and I promise you that one won't miss its target!"

But these just reprisals could not bring Ayrton back to life, and, from this examination of the footprints left on the ground, it was necessary, alas! to conclude that there was no longer any hope of ever seeing him again!

That evening, the camp was established fourteen miles from Granite-House, and Cyrus Smith estimated that it should not be more than five miles from Reptile's Promontory.

And indeed, the next day, the tip of the peninsula was reached, and the forest crossed along its entire length; but no clue had made it possible to find the retreat where the convicts had taken refuge, nor the one, no less secret, which gave asylum to the mysterious stranger.

CHAPTER XII

The following day, February 18th, was devoted to exploring the entire wooded area that formed the coastline from Reptile Point to the river at the falls. The colonists were able to thoroughly search this forest, which varied in width from three to four miles, as it stretched between the two shores of the serpentine peninsula. The trees, by their height and thick canopy, attested to the soil's vegetative power, more astonishing here than in any other part of the island. It was like a corner of those virgin forests of America or Central Africa, transported beneath this mid-zone. This led one to believe that these magnificent plants found in this soil, moist in its upper layer but heated internally by volcanic fires, a warmth that could not belong to a temperate climate. The dominant species were precisely these kauri and eucalyptus trees, which reached gigantic dimensions.

But the colonists' aim was not to admire these magnificent plants. They already knew that, in this respect, Lincoln Island deserved to be included among the Canary Islands, whose original name was the Fortunate Isles. Now, alas! Their island no longer belonged entirely to them; others had taken possession of it, scoundrels trod its soil, and they had to be destroyed to the last man. On the western coast, no trace

of them could be found, no matter how carefully they searched. No more footprints, no more broken tree trunks, no more cold ashes, no more abandoned encampments.

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Cyrus Smith told his companions. “The convicts landed on the island near the tip of the wreck and immediately plunged into the Far West forests after crossing the shelduck marsh. They followed roughly the same route we took when we left Granite House. That explains the tracks we recognized in the woods. But once they reached the shore, the convicts realized they wouldn’t find a suitable refuge there, and it was then, heading north, that they discovered the corral…”

— Where they may have returned… said Pencroff.

"I don't think so," replied the engineer, "because they must assume that our search will focus on that direction. The corral is only a supply depot for them, not a permanent encampment."

"I agree with Cyrus," said the reporter, "and, in my opinion, it must be in the middle of the foothills of Mount Franklin that the convicts sought a hideout."

"Well then, Mr. Cyrus, straight to the corral!" cried Pencroff. "This must end, and so far we've wasted our time!"

“No, my friend,” replied the engineer. “You forget that we had an interest in knowing whether the forests of the Far West contained any dwellings. Our exploration has a dual purpose, Pencroff. If, on the one hand, we must punish the crime, on the other, we have an act of reconnaissance to perform!”

"That's well said, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor. "However, I suspect we'll only find this gentleman if he's willing!"

And, truly, Pencroff was merely expressing everyone's opinion. It was likely that the stranger's retreat was no less mysterious than he himself was!

That evening, the wagon stopped at the mouth of the river at the falls. The sleeping arrangements were made according to custom, and the usual precautions were taken for the night. Harbert, once again the vigorous and healthy young man he had been before his illness, thoroughly enjoyed this life in the open air, between the ocean breezes and the invigorating atmosphere of the forests. His place was no longer on the wagon, but at the head of the caravan.

The following day, February 19, the colonists, leaving the shoreline where, beyond the river mouth, basalts of all shapes were so picturesquely piled up, went upriver along its left bank. The route was

partially cleared by previous excursions from the corral to the west coast. The colonists were then six miles from Mount Franklin.

The engineer's plan was this: to carefully observe the entire valley whose thalweg formed the riverbed, and cautiously approach the area around the corral; if the corral was occupied, to take it by force; if it was not, to entrench themselves there and make it the center of operations which would have the objective of exploring Mount Franklin.

This plan was unanimously approved by the colonists, and they were truly eager to have regained full possession of their island!

So they made their way through the narrow valley that separated two of Mount Franklin's most imposing buttresses. The trees, pressed close to the riverbanks, thinned out toward the higher reaches of the volcano. It was a hilly, rather rugged terrain, very prone to traps, and one ventured onto it only with extreme caution. Top and Jup walked ahead as scouts, and, darting from right to left into the thick undergrowth, they vied with each other in intelligence and skill. But nothing indicated that the riverbanks had been recently frequented, nothing foreshadowed either the presence or the proximity of the convicts.

Around five o'clock in the evening, the wagon stopped about six hundred paces from the palisaded enclosure. A semi-circular curtain of tall trees still concealed it.

The aim was therefore to reconnoiter the corral, in order to determine if it was occupied. Going there openly, in broad daylight, in case the convicts were lying in ambush, was to risk receiving some bad blow, as had happened to Harbert.

It was therefore better to wait until nightfall.

However, Gideon Spilett wanted to reconnoiter the approaches to the corral without further delay, and Pencroff, at the end of his patience, offered to accompany him.

"No, my friends," replied the engineer. "Wait until nightfall. I will not allow any of you to expose yourselves in broad daylight."

"But, Mr. Cyrus..." replied the sailor, unwilling to obey.

"Please, Pencroff," said the engineer.

"So be it!" replied the sailor, who gave another direction to his anger by bestowing upon the convicts the harshest qualifications in the maritime repertoire.

The settlers therefore remained around the wagon, and they carefully watched the nearby parts of the forest.

Three hours passed in this way. The wind had died down, and absolute silence reigned beneath the tall trees. The rustle of the thinnest branch, the sound of footsteps on dry leaves, the squeal of a

body sliding between the grasses, would have been easily heard. All was quiet. Moreover, Top, lying on the ground with his head stretched out on his paws, showed no sign of distress.

At eight o'clock, evening seemed advanced enough for the reconnaissance to be carried out under good conditions. Gideon Spilett declared himself ready to leave, accompanied by Pencroff. Cyrus Smith agreed. Top and Jup had to remain with the engineer, Harbert, and Nab, as it was essential that no ill-timed bark or shout not be allowed to raise the alarm.

"Do not proceed rashly," Cyrus Smith advised the sailor and the reporter. "You do not have to take possession of the corral, but only to ascertain whether it is occupied or not."

"That's agreed," replied Pencroff.

And they both left.

Beneath the trees, thanks to the thickness of their foliage, a certain darkness already rendered objects invisible beyond a radius of thirty to forty feet. The reporter and Pencroff, stopping as soon as any noise seemed suspicious, advanced only with the utmost caution.

They walked apart from each other, so as to offer less of a target for gunfire. And, to tell the truth, they expected a shot to ring out at any moment.

Five minutes after leaving the wagon, Gideon Spilett and Pencroff had arrived at the edge of the woods, in front of the clearing at the bottom of which stood the palisaded enclosure.

They stopped. A few faint glimmers of light still bathed the treeless meadow. Thirty paces away stood the corral gate, which appeared to be closed. These thirty paces, which they had to cross between the edge of the woods and the enclosure, constituted the danger zone, to use a term borrowed from ballistics. Indeed, one or more bullets, fired from the top of the palisade, would have knocked to the ground anyone who ventured into that area.

Gideon Spilett and the sailor were not men to back down, but they knew that any imprudence on their part, of which they would be the first victims, would then fall upon their companions. With them killed, what would become of Cyrus Smith, Nab, and Harbert?

But Pencroff, overexcited at feeling so close to the corral, where he supposed the convicts had taken refuge, was about to move forward, when the reporter held him back with a vigorous hand.

"In a few moments, it will be completely dark," Gideon Spilett whispered in Pencroff's ear, "and that will be the time to act."

Pencroff, convulsively gripping the butt of his rifle, restrained himself and waited, grumbling.

Soon, the last vestiges of twilight faded completely. The shadow that seemed to emerge from the thick forest engulfed the clearing. Mount Franklin rose like a massive screen against the setting sun, and darkness fell quickly, as it does in regions already at lower latitudes. This was the moment.

The reporter and Pencroff, since they had taken up positions at the edge of the woods, had not lost sight of the palisaded enclosure. The corral appeared to be completely abandoned. The crest of the palisade formed a line slightly darker than the surrounding shadows, and nothing marred its sharpness.

However, if the convicts were there, they must have posted one of their own, so as to guarantee against any surprises.

Gideon Spilett shook his companion's hand, and the two of them crawled forward towards the corral, their rifles ready to fire.

They arrived at the gate of the enclosure without the shadows having been pierced by a single streak of light.

Pencroff tried to push the door open, which, as he and the reporter had assumed, was closed.

However, the sailor was able to see that the outer bars had not been put in place.

It could therefore be concluded that the convicts were then occupying the corral, and that, presumably, they had secured the gate so that it could not be forced open.

Gideon Spilett and Pencroff listened attentively.

There was no noise inside the enclosure. The mouflons and goats, no doubt asleep in their stables, did not disturb the calm of the night at all.

The reporter and the sailor, hearing nothing, wondered whether they should climb the palisade and enter the corral. This was contrary to Cyrus Smith's instructions.

It is true that the operation could succeed, but it could also fail. Now, if the convicts suspected nothing, if they were unaware of the attempted expedition against them, if finally there existed, at that moment, a chance of surprising them, should one compromise this chance by recklessly venturing to cross the palisade?

The reporter disagreed. He thought it wise to wait until all the settlers were gathered before attempting to enter the corral. What was certain was that they could reach the palisade unseen, and the enclosure didn't appear to be guarded. With that point established, all that remained was to return to the wagon and decide what to do next.

Pencroff likely shared this view, as he readily followed the reporter when the latter retreated into the woods. A few minutes later, the

engineer was briefed on the situation.

"Well," he said, "after thinking about it, I now have reason to believe that the convicts are not in the corral."

"We'll know for sure," replied Pencroff, "when we've scaled the wall."

— To the corral, my friends! said Cyrus Smith.

"Shall we leave the wagon in the woods?" asked Nab.

— No, replied the engineer, it is our ammunition and food wagon, and, if necessary, it will serve as our entrenchment.

"Let's go then!" said Gideon Spilett.

The cart emerged from the woods and began to roll silently toward the palisade. The darkness was profound then, the silence as complete as when Pencroff and the reporter had crawled away. The thick grass completely muffled the sound of their footsteps.

The settlers were ready to fire. Jup, on Pencroff's orders, stood at the rear. Nab led Top on a leash, so that he wouldn't bolt forward.

The clearing soon appeared. It was deserted.

Without hesitation, the small group advanced toward the enclosure. In a short time, they crossed the danger zone. Not a shot had been fired. When the wagon reached the palisade, it stopped. Nab remained at the head of the onaggas to hold them back. The engineer, the reporter,

Harbert, and Pencroff then headed toward the gate to see if it was barricaded from the inside... one of the leaves was open!

"But what were you saying?" asked the engineer, turning back to the sailor and Gideon Spilett.

They were both stunned.

"By my goodness," said Pencroff, "that door was locked just now!"

The colonists hesitated. Were the convicts at the corral when Pencroff and the reporter were reconnoitering it? There could be no doubt, since the gate, which was closed, could only have been opened by them! Were they still there, or had one of them just left?

All these questions instantly came to everyone's mind, but how to answer them? At that moment, Harbert, who had advanced a few steps inside the enclosure, stepped back abruptly and seized Cyrus Smith's hand.

"What is it?" asked the engineer.

— A light!

— In the house?

- Yes!"

All five of them advanced towards the door, and indeed, through the panes of the window facing them, they saw a faint glimmer flicker.

Cyrus Smith quickly took his side.

"This is a unique opportunity," he told his companions, "to find the convicts locked up in this house, expecting nothing! They are ours! Forward!"

The settlers then slipped into the enclosure, rifles ready to be shouldered. The wagon had been left outside under the guard of Jup and Top, who had been tied to it as a precaution.

Cyrus Smith, Pencroff, and Gideon Spilett, on one side, and Harbert and Nab, on the other, walking along the palisade, observed this section of the corral which was completely dark and deserted. In a few moments, they were all near the house, in front of the closed door.

Cyrus Smith signaled to his companions not to move, and he approached the window, which was then dimly lit by the interior light.

His gaze plunged into the single room, forming the ground floor of the house. A lit lantern shone on the table. Near the table was the bed that Ayrton had once used.

The body of a man lay on the bed.

Suddenly, Cyrus Smith stepped back, and in a muffled voice:

"Ayrton!" he cried. At once, the door was forced open rather than opened, and the colonists rushed into the room.

Ayrton appeared to be asleep. His face bore witness to the long and cruel suffering he had endured. Large bruises were visible on his wrists and ankles.

Cyrus Smith leaned over him.

"Ayrton!" exclaimed the engineer, grabbing the arm of the man he had just found again in such unexpected circumstances.

At this call, Ayrton opened his eyes, and looking straight at Cyrus Smith, then at the others:

"You," he cried, "you?"

— Ayrton! Ayrton! repeated Cyrus Smith.

— Where am I?

— In the corral's dwelling!

- Alone?

- Yes!

"But they're coming!" cried Ayrton. "Defend yourselves! Defend yourselves!"

And Ayrton collapsed, exhausted.

"Spilett," said the engineer, "we could be attacked at any moment. Get the wagon into the corral. Then barricade the gate, and all of you come back here."

Pencroff, Nab, and the reporter hastened to carry out the engineer's orders. There wasn't a moment to lose. Perhaps the wagon was already in the hands of the convicts! In an instant, the reporter and his two companions had crossed the corral and reached the gate of the palisade, behind which Top could be heard rumbling low.

The engineer, leaving Ayrton for a moment, stepped out of the house, ready to fire. Harbert was at his side. They both watched the crest of the buttress overlooking the corral. If the convicts were lying in ambush there, they could strike the settlers one after another. At that moment, the moon appeared in the east above the dark curtain of the forest, and a white sheet of light spread within the enclosure.

The corral was entirely illuminated, with its clumps of trees, the small stream that watered it, and its broad carpet of grass. On the mountain side, the house and part of the palisade stood out in white. On the opposite side, toward the gate, the enclosure remained dark. A black mass soon appeared. It was the wagon entering the circle of light, and Cyrus Smith could hear the sound of the gate being closed by his companions, their leaves securely fastened on the inside.

But, at that moment, Top violently broke his leash, began to bark furiously and rushed towards the back of the corral, on the right side of the house.

"Attention, my friends, and aim!..." shouted Cyrus Smith.

The settlers had shouldered their rifles and were waiting for the moment to fire. Top was still barking, and Jup, running towards the dog, let out high-pitched whistles.

The settlers followed him and arrived at the edge of the small stream, shaded by large trees.

And there, in broad daylight, what did they see?

Five bodies, lying on the riverbank!

These were the convicts who, four months earlier, had landed on Lincoln Island!

CHAPTER XIII

What had happened? Who had attacked the convicts?

Was it Ayrton then? No, because, just a moment before, he had been dreading their return!

But Ayrton was then under the influence of a deep sleep from which it was no longer possible to rouse him. After the few words he had uttered, an overwhelming torpor had seized him, and he had fallen back onto his bed, motionless.

The colonists, prey to a thousand confused thoughts and under the influence of a violent agitation, waited all night without leaving Ayrton's house, without returning to the place where the convicts' bodies lay. Regarding the circumstances of their deaths, it was likely that Ayrton would be unable to tell them anything, since he himself did not know he was in the corral house. But at least he would be able to recount the events that had preceded this terrible execution.

The next day, Ayrton emerged from this torpor, and his companions cordially expressed all the joy they felt at seeing him again, more or less safe and sound, after one hundred and four days of separation.

Ayrton then recounted in a few words what had happened, or at least what he knew.

The day after his arrival at the corral, on November 10th, at nightfall, he was surprised by the convicts, who had scaled the enclosure.

They bound and gagged him; then he was taken to a dark cave at the foot of Mount Franklin, where the convicts had taken refuge.

His death had been decided upon, and the next day he was about to be killed, when one of the convicts recognized him and called him by the name he had used in Australia. Those wretches wanted to massacre Ayrton! They respected Ben Joyce!

But from that moment on, Ayrton was the target of his former accomplices' obsessions. They wanted to bring him back to their side, and they were counting on him to seize Granite House, to penetrate that inaccessible dwelling, to become masters of the island, after having murdered its colonists!

Ayrton resisted. The former convict, repentant and forgiven, would rather die than betray his companions.

Ayrton, tied up, gagged, and held in custody, lived in this cave for four months.

However, the convicts had discovered the corral shortly after their arrival on the island, and since then they had been living on its reserves, but not inhabiting it. On November 11, two of these bandits, unexpectedly surprised by the arrival of the colonists, opened fire on Harbert, and one of them returned boasting of having killed one of the island's inhabitants, but he returned alone. His companion, as we know, had fallen to the dagger of Cyrus Smith. Imagine Ayrton's anxiety and despair when he learned of Harbert's death! The colonists were now only four, and practically at the mercy of the convicts!

Following this event, and for as long as the colonists, detained by Harbert's illness, remained at the corral, the pirates did not leave their

cave, and even after plundering the plateau of Grande-vue, they did not think it prudent to abandon it.

The mistreatment inflicted on Ayrton intensified. His hands and feet still bore the bloody marks of the bonds that tied him day and night. At every moment he awaited a death from which it seemed he could not escape.

This continued until the third week of February. The convicts, always on the lookout for a favorable opportunity, rarely left their retreat and only made a few hunting excursions, either inland or as far as the southern coast. Ayrton had no further news of his friends, and he no longer hoped to see them again! Finally, the unfortunate man, weakened by the mistreatment, fell into a deep prostration that prevented him from seeing or hearing. Consequently, from that moment on, that is to say, for the past two days, he could not even say what had happened.

"But, Mr. Smith," he added, "since I was imprisoned in this cavern, how is it that I find myself in the corral?"

"How is it that the convicts are lying there, dead, in the middle of the enclosure?" replied the engineer.

"Dead!" cried Ayrton, who, despite his weakness, half rose up.

His companions supported him. He wanted to get up, they let him, and they all headed towards the small stream.

It was broad daylight.

There, on the bank, in the position where they had been surprised by a death that must have been sudden, lay the five corpses of the convicts!

Ayrton was devastated. Cyrus Smith and his companions stared at him without uttering a word. At a signal from the engineer, Nab and Pencroff examined the bodies, already stiff with cold.

They showed no apparent signs of injury.

However, after carefully examining them, Pencroff noticed on the forehead of one, on the chest of another, on the back of this one, on the shoulder of that one, a small red dot, a kind of barely visible contusion, and whose origin it was impossible to recognize.

"That's where they were hit!" said Cyrus Smith.

"But with what weapon?" exclaimed the reporter.

— A devastating weapon whose secret we do not possess!

— And who struck them down?... asked Pencroff.

"The island's vigilante," replied Cyrus Smith, "the one who brought you here, Ayrton, the one whose influence has once again manifested

itself, the one who does for us all that we cannot do ourselves, and who, having done so, eludes us."

"Let's look for him then!" cried Pencroff.

“Yes, let us seek him,” replied Cyrus Smith, “but the superior being who performs such wonders, we will only find him if he finally decides to call us to him!”

This invisible protection, which rendered their own actions meaningless, both irritated and moved the engineer. The relative inferiority it revealed was the kind that can wound a proud soul. A generosity that deliberately avoided any expression of gratitude betrayed a kind of disdain for those indebted to it, which, in Cyrus Smith's eyes, diminished the value of the act of kindness to a certain extent.

“Let us search,” he continued, “and may God grant that we may one day be allowed to prove to this haughty protector that he is not dealing with ingrates! What wouldn’t I give so that we could repay him, by rendering him in turn, even at the cost of our lives, some distinguished service!”

From that day on, this search became the sole preoccupation of the inhabitants of Lincoln Island. Everything pushed them to discover the

key to this enigma, a key that could only be the name of a man endowed with a truly inexplicable and, in a way, superhuman power.

After a few moments, the colonists returned to the corral dwelling, where their care promptly restored Ayrton's moral and physical energy.

Nab and Pencroff carried the convicts' corpses into the forest, some distance from the corral, and buried them deeply.

Then, Ayrton was informed of the events that had transpired during his captivity. He learned of Harbert's adventures and the series of ordeals the colonists had endured. As for them, they had given up hope of ever seeing Ayrton again and feared that the convicts had ruthlessly massacred him.

"And now," said Cyrus Smith, concluding his story, "we have one more duty to perform. Half of our task is done, but if the convicts are no longer to be feared, it is not to us that we have regained control of the island."

"Well then!" replied Gideon Spilett, "let's search this whole labyrinth of the foothills of Mount Franklin! Let's not leave a single excavation, not a single hole unexplored! Ah! If ever a reporter has found himself in the presence of a moving mystery, it is I who speak to you, my friends!"

— And we will not return to Granite-House, replied Harbert, until we have found our benefactor.

— Yes! said the engineer, we will do everything humanly possible... but, I repeat, we will only find him if he allows it!

"Shall we stay in the corral?" asked Pencroff.

“Let’s stay here,” replied Cyrus Smith. “The supplies are plentiful, and we are right in the center of our search area. Besides, if necessary, the wagon will quickly make its way to Granite House.”

"Good," replied the sailor. "Only one observation."

- Which?

— Here comes the beautiful season, and we must not forget that we have a crossing to make.

— A crossing? said Gideon Spilett.

"Yes! The one on Tabor Island," replied Pencroff. "It's necessary to leave a notice there indicating the location of our island, where Ayrton is currently, in case the Scottish yacht comes to pick him up. Who knows if it isn't already too late?"

"But, Pencroff," asked Ayrton, "how do you intend to make this crossing?"

— On the Bonadventure!

"The Bonadventure!" cried Ayrton... "it no longer exists."

"My Bonadventure is no more!" yelled Pencroff, leaping up.

"No!" replied Ayrton. "The convicts discovered him in his little port just eight days ago; they set sail, and..."

"And?" said Pencroff, whose heart was pounding.

— And, with Bob Harvey no longer available to maneuver, they ran aground on the rocks, and the boat was completely destroyed!

— Ah! The wretches! The bandits! The infamous scoundrels! cried Pencroff.

"Pencroff," said Harbert, taking the sailor's hand, "we'll build another Bonadventure, a bigger one! We have all the fittings, all the rigging of the brig at our disposal!"

"But do you know," replied Pencroff, "that it takes at least five to six months to build a boat of thirty to forty tons?"

"We will take our time," replied the reporter, "and we will forgo crossing to Tabor Island this year."

"What do you want, Pencroff, we have to resign ourselves to it," said the engineer, "and I hope that this delay will not be detrimental to us."

"Ah! My Bonadventure! My poor Bonadventure!" cried Pencroff, truly dismayed at the loss of his boat, of which he was so proud!

The destruction of the Bonadventure was obviously a regrettable event for the colonists, and it was agreed that this loss should be

repaired as soon as possible. This settled, attention turned solely to completing the exploration of the most secluded parts of the island. A search began that very day, February 19th, and lasted a full week. The base of the mountain, between its foothills and their numerous offshoots, formed a labyrinth of valleys and counter-valleys arranged in a most capricious fashion. It was evidently there, at the bottom of these narrow gorges, perhaps even within the massif of Mount Franklin, that the search should continue. No part of the island could have been more suitable for concealing a dwelling whose inhabitant wished to remain unknown. But such was the intricate network of foothills that Cyrus Smith had to proceed with a rigorous method in his exploration.

The colonists first explored the entire valley that opened south of the volcano and collected the first waters of the river from the falls. It was there that Ayrton showed them the cave where the convicts had taken refuge and where he had been held captive until his transport to the corral. This cave was exactly as Ayrton had left it. A certain amount of ammunition and provisions were found there, which the convicts had removed with the intention of creating a supply depot.

The entire valley that led to the cave, a valley shaded by beautiful trees, among which conifers dominated, was explored with extreme care, and the southwest buttress having been turned to its point, the

settlers entered a narrower gorge which began at that picturesque accumulation of coastal basalts.

Here, trees were less common. Stone replaced grass. Wild goats and bighorn sheep frolicked among the rocks. There began the arid part of the island. It was already clear that, of the many valleys branching out from the base of Mount Franklin, only three were wooded and rich in pasture, like the Corral Valley, which bordered the Valley of the Falls River to the west and the Valley of the Red Creek to the east. These two streams, which further downstream become rivers through the absorption of several tributaries, were formed from all the waters of the mountain and thus determined the fertility of its southern portion. As for the Mercy River, it was more directly fed by abundant springs hidden beneath the canopy of jacamar trees, and it was also springs of this kind that, flowing in a thousand rivulets, watered the soil of the serpentine peninsula.

Of these three valleys, where water was plentiful, one could have served as a retreat for some solitary figure who would have found there everything necessary for life. But the colonists had already explored them, and nowhere had they been able to find any trace of human presence.

Was it then at the bottom of these arid gorges, amidst the scree of rocks, in the harsh northern ravines, between the lava flows, that this retreat and its host would be found?

The northern part of Mount Franklin consisted solely of two wide, shallow valleys at its base, devoid of any vegetation, strewn with erratic boulders, streaked with long moraines, paved with lava, marked by large mineral lumps, and sprinkled with obsidian and labradorite. This area required long and difficult explorations.

There, a thousand cavities lay hollow, undoubtedly uncomfortable, but completely hidden and difficult to access. The colonists even visited dark tunnels dating back to the Plutonian era, still blackened by the passage of ancient fires, which plunged deep into the mountain's massif. They explored these dark galleries, carried burning resins through them, searched every nook and cranny, and probed every depth. But everywhere, silence and darkness. It seemed as though no human being had ever set foot in these ancient corridors, that their arm had ever moved a single one of these blocks. Such were they, such was the volcano that had hurled them above the waters at the time of the island's emergence.

However, although these substructures appeared to be absolutely deserted, although the darkness there was complete, Cyrus Smith was

forced to recognize that absolute silence did not reign there.

Upon reaching the bottom of one of these dark cavities, which extended for several hundred feet inside the mountain, he was surprised to hear muffled rumblings, the intensity of which was increased by the sound of the rocks.

Gideon Spilett, who was with him, also heard these distant murmurs, which indicated a rekindling of the subterranean fires. Several times, they both listened, and they agreed that some chemical reaction was taking place deep within the earth.

"So the volcano is not completely extinct?" said the reporter.

"It is possible that, since our exploration of the crater," replied Cyrus Smith, "some work has been carried out in the lower layers. Any volcano, even one considered extinct, can obviously reignite."

"But if an eruption of Mount Franklin were to occur," asked Gideon Spilett, "wouldn't there be a danger to Lincoln Island?"

"I don't think so," replied the engineer. "The crater, that is to say the safety valve, exists, and the excess vapors and lava will escape, as it did in the past, through its usual outlet."

— Unless these lava flows find a new path towards the fertile parts of the island!

"Why, my dear Spilett," replied Cyrus Smith, "why should they not follow the path that is naturally laid out for them?"

"Hey! Volcanoes are capricious!" replied the reporter.

“Note,” the engineer continued, “that the slope of the entire Mount Franklin massif encourages the flow of material towards the valleys we are currently exploring. An earthquake would have to shift the mountain's center of gravity for this flow to change.”

"But an earthquake is always a possibility under these conditions," observed Gideon Spilett.

“Always,” replied the engineer, “especially when the subterranean forces begin to awaken and the Earth’s interior risks becoming blocked after a long period of dormancy. Therefore, my dear Spilett, an eruption would be a serious matter for us, and would it be far better if this volcano didn’t even have the inclination to awaken? But there’s nothing we can do about it, is there? In any case, whatever happens, I don’t believe our estate at Grande-vue can be seriously threatened. Between it and the mountain, the ground is noticeably depressed, and if the lava were ever to flow towards the lake, it would be deposited on the dunes and the neighboring sections of Shark Gulf.”

"We have not yet seen any smoke at the top of the mountain that would indicate any imminent eruption," said Gideon Spilett.

“No,” replied Cyrus Smith, “not a single wisp of steam escapes from the crater, whose summit I observed just yesterday. But it is possible that, at the base of the vent, time has accumulated rocks, ash, and hardened lava, and that this valve I mentioned is momentarily overloaded. However, at the first serious exertion, all obstruction will disappear, and you can be certain, my dear Spilett, that neither the island, which is the cauldron, nor the volcano, which is the vent, will burst under the pressure of the gases. Nevertheless, I repeat, it would be better if there were no eruption.”

"And yet we are not mistaken," the reporter continued. "We can indeed hear deep rumblings in the very bowels of the volcano!"

“Indeed,” replied the engineer, who listened with continued rapt attention, “there’s no mistaking it… a reaction is taking place whose importance and final outcome we cannot yet assess.”

Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett, after going outside, rejoined their companions, to whom they informed this state of affairs.

"Well!" cried Pencroff, "that volcano trying to cause trouble! Let him try! He'll meet his match!"

— Who then? asked Nab.

"Our genius, Nab, our genius, who will gag his crater if he so much as tries to open it!"

As we can see, the sailor's trust in the special god of his island was absolute, and, certainly, the occult power which had manifested itself so far by so many inexplicable acts seemed to be without limits; but, also, it managed to escape the meticulous searches of the colonists, for, despite all their efforts, despite the zeal, more than zeal, the tenacity which they brought to their exploration, the strange retreat could not be discovered.

From February 19th to 25th, the scope of the investigations was extended to the entire northern region of Lincoln Island, including its most secluded hideouts. The colonists went so far as to probe every rock face, like detectives examining the walls of a suspicious house. The engineer even took a very precise survey of the mountain and extended his excavations down to the very foundations that supported it.

It was explored even up to the truncated cone that ended the first stage of the rocks, then up to the upper edge of this enormous cap at the bottom of which the crater opened.

They did more: they visited the chasm, still extinct, but in whose depths rumblings could be distinctly heard. However, not a wisp of smoke, not a vapor, not a sign of heat on the wall indicated an imminent eruption. But neither there, nor anywhere else on Mount Franklin, did the colonists find any trace of the one they were looking for.

The investigations were then directed across the entire dune region. The high lava walls of Shark Gulf were carefully examined from base to crest, although reaching the gulf itself proved extremely difficult. Nobody! Nothing!

Finally, these two words summed up so much wasted effort, so much obstinacy that produced no results, and there was a kind of anger in the disappointment of Cyrus Smith and his companions.

It was therefore necessary to consider returning, as these searches could not continue indefinitely. The colonists were truly justified in believing that the mysterious being did not reside on the island's surface, and so the wildest hypotheses haunted their overexcited imaginations. Pencroff and Nab, in particular, were no longer content with the strange and allowed themselves to be swept away into the world of the supernatural.

On February 25th, the colonists returned to Granite House, and by means of the double rope, which an arrow carried back to the door landing, they re-established communication between their compound and the ground. A month later, on the twenty-fifth day of March, they celebrated the third anniversary of their arrival on Lincoln Island!

CHAPTER XIV

Three years had passed since the prisoners of Richmond had escaped, and how many times, during those three years, they spoke of the homeland, always present in their thoughts!

They had no doubt that the civil war was over by then, and it seemed impossible to them that the just cause of the north had not prevailed. But what had been the events of this terrible war? How much blood had it cost? Which of their friends had fallen in the fighting? These were the things they often talked about, without yet glimpsing the day when they would be able to see their country again. To return there, even for just a few days, to re-establish social ties with the outside world, to re-establish communication between their homeland and their island, and then to spend the longest, perhaps the best, of their lives in this colony they had founded, which would then be under the jurisdiction of the mother country—was this then an unattainable dream?

But there were only two ways to realize this dream: either a ship would one day appear in the waters of Lincoln Island, or the colonists would themselves build a vessel strong enough to withstand the sea to the nearest land.

"Unless," said Pencroff, "our genius itself provides the means to repatriate us!"

And, truly, if someone had told Pencroff and Nab that a three-hundred-ton ship was waiting for them in Shark Bay or at Port-Ballon, they wouldn't have even flinched. In that respect, they expected anything.

But Cyrus Smith, less confident, advised them to get back to reality, and this was about the construction of a building, a truly urgent task, since it involved depositing as soon as possible on Tabor Island a document indicating Ayrton's new residence.

With the Bonadventure no longer in existence, at least six months would be needed to build a new ship. However, winter was approaching, and the voyage could not take place before the following spring.

“So we have time to prepare for the warmer months,” said the engineer, who was discussing these matters with Pencroff. “I think, therefore, my friend, that since we have to refit our boat, it would be best to make it considerably larger. The arrival of the Scottish yacht at Tabor Island is quite problematic. It may even be that, having arrived several months ago, it has already left, after having searched in vain for some trace of Ayrton.”

Wouldn't it be appropriate to build a ship that, if necessary, could transport us either to the Polynesian archipelagos or to New Zealand?

What do you think?

"I think, Mr. Cyrus," replied the sailor, "I think you are just as capable of building a large ship as a small one. We have no shortage of wood or tools. It's only a matter of time."

"And how many months would it take to build a ship of two hundred and fifty to three hundred tons?" asked Cyrus Smith.

“Seven or eight months at least,” replied Pencroff. “But we mustn’t forget that winter is coming, and in the bitter cold, wood is difficult to work with. So let’s expect a few weeks of downtime, and if our building is ready by next November, we’ll consider ourselves very fortunate.”

— Well, replied Cyrus Smith, this would be precisely the favorable time to undertake a crossing of some importance, either to Tabor Island or to a more distant land.

“Indeed, Mr. Cyrus,” replied the sailor. “Make your plans, the workmen are ready, and I imagine Ayrton will be able to give us a good hand in this situation.”

The colonists, consulted, approved the engineer's plan, and it was, in truth, the best course of action. It is true that building a ship of two to three hundred tons was a major undertaking, but the colonists possessed a confidence justified by many successes already achieved.

Cyrus Smith then took charge of drawing up the ship's plans and determining its dimensions. Meanwhile, his companions worked on felling and hauling the trees that would provide the frames, ribs, and planking. The Far West forests yielded the best oak and elm trees. They took advantage of the clearing already made during the last expedition to open a passable road, which became known as the Far West Road, and the trees were transported to the funnels, where the construction yard was established.

As for the road in question, it was capriciously laid out, and it was somewhat the choice of woods that determined its course, but it facilitated access to a significant portion of the serpentine peninsula.

It was important that the timbers be cut and processed quickly, as they could not be used while still green, and time had to take its toll on hardening them. The carpenters therefore worked diligently throughout April, a month disturbed only by a few rather violent equinoctial gales. Master Jup skillfully assisted them, either climbing to the top of a tree to secure the felling ropes, or lending his strong shoulders to carry the limbed trunks.

All this wood was piled up under a large lean-to made of planks, which was built near the chimneys, and there it waited for the moment to be put into use.

April was quite fine, as October often is in the boreal zone. At the same time, fieldwork was actively pursued, and soon all traces of devastation had disappeared from the Grande-vue plateau. The mill was rebuilt, and new buildings were erected on the site of the barnyard. It had seemed necessary to rebuild them on a larger scale, as the bird population was increasing considerably. The stables now housed five onaggas, four of them vigorous and well-trained, ready to be harnessed or ridden, and one newborn calf. The colony's equipment had been augmented by a plow, and the onaggas were employed in plowing, like true Yorkshire or Kentucky oxen. Each of the colonists shared the work, and no one was idle. Also, what excellent health these workers enjoyed, and what a cheerful atmosphere they brought to the evenings at Granite-House, forming a thousand projects for the future!

It goes without saying that Ayrton fully shared their daily life, and that going back to live in the corral was no longer an option for him. However, he remained melancholy, rather withdrawn, and preferred to participate in the work rather than the pleasures of his companions. But he was a hard worker, vigorous, skillful, resourceful, and intelligent. He was respected and loved by all; he couldn't possibly be unaware of it.

However, the corral was not abandoned. Every two days, one of the settlers, driving the wagon or riding one of the onaggas, would go to tend the herd of mouflon and goats and bring back the milk that supplied Nab's office. These excursions were also hunting opportunities. Thus, Harbert and Gideon Spilet—Top onward—ran more often than any of their companions on the road to the corral, and, with the excellent weapons at their disposal, capybaras, agoutis, kangaroos, wild boars, wild pigs for big game, and ducks, grouse, black grouse, jacamars, and snipe for small game, were never lacking at home. The warren's produce, the oyster beds, some turtles that were caught, a new catch of those excellent salmon that once again rushed into the waters of the Mercy, the vegetables from the Grande-vue plateau, the natural fruits of the forest, it was riches upon riches, and Nab, the head cook, was barely enough to store them.

It goes without saying that the telegraph line laid between the corral and Granite House had been restored and was functioning when either of the colonists was at the corral and deemed it necessary to spend the night there. Moreover, the island was now safe, and no aggression was to be feared—at least not from men.

However, the events that had occurred could still happen again. A raid by pirates, or even escaped convicts, was always a possibility. It was

possible that companions and accomplices of Bob Harvey, still imprisoned in Norfolk, might have been privy to his plans and be tempted to imitate him. The colonists therefore kept a close watch on the island's landings, and every day their spyglasses were swept across the wide horizon that encompassed Union Bay and Washington Bay.

When they went to the corral, they examined the western part of the sea with no less attention, and, rising onto the buttress, their gaze could sweep across a wide sector of the western horizon.

Nothing suspicious appeared, but they still had to remain vigilant. So one evening, the engineer shared with his friends his plan to fortify the corral. He felt it prudent to raise the palisaded wall and flank it with a kind of blockhouse in which, if necessary, the colonists could hold out against an enemy force. Since Granite House was considered impregnable by its very position, the corral, with its buildings, stores, and the animals it contained, would always be a target for any pirates who landed on the island, and if the colonists were forced to take refuge there, they had to be able to resist without being at a disadvantage.

This was a project that needed further development, and whose execution, moreover, was necessarily postponed until next spring.

Around May 15th, the keel of the new ship was being laid out on the building site, and soon the stem and sternpost, mortised at each end,

stood almost perpendicular to it. This keel, made of good oak, was one hundred and ten feet long, which would allow for a beam of twenty-five feet. But that was all the carpenters could accomplish before the arrival of the cold and bad weather. During the following week, the first frames of the stern were put in place; then, work had to be suspended.

During the last days of the month, the weather was extremely bad. The wind blew from the east, and sometimes with the violence of a hurricane. The engineer had some concerns about the construction site sheds—which, moreover, he could not have established anywhere else near Granite House—because the islet only imperfectly protected the coastline against the fury of the open sea, and, in great storms, the waves came crashing directly against the foot of the granite wall.

But, fortunately, these fears did not materialize. The wind instead blew to the southeast side, and, under these conditions, the shore of Granite-House was completely covered by the redan of the wreck's point.

Pencroff and Ayrton, the two most zealous builders of the new vessel, continued their work as long as they could. They were not men to be bothered by the wind that twisted their hair, nor by the rain that soaked them to the bone, and a hammer blow is as good in bad weather as in good. But when a very sharp cold followed this wet period, the wood,

whose fibers acquired the hardness of iron, became extremely difficult to work, and, around June 10th, the construction of the ship had to be definitively abandoned.

Cyrus Smith and his companions had certainly noticed how harsh the winters were on Lincoln Island. The cold was comparable to that experienced in the New England states, located at roughly the same distance from the equator. While in the Northern Hemisphere, or at least in the part occupied by New Britain and the northern United States, this phenomenon can be explained by the flat topography of the territories bordering the pole, where no landforms offer any resistance to the northern winds, this explanation could not apply to Lincoln Island.

“It has even been observed,” Cyrus Smith once told his companions, “that, at the same latitudes, islands and coastal regions are less affected by the cold than Mediterranean countries. I have often heard it said that the winters of Lombardy, for example, are more severe than those of Scotland, and this is supposedly because the sea releases during the winter the heat it received during the summer. The islands are therefore in the best position to benefit from this release.”

"But then, Mr. Cyrus," asked Harbert, "why does Lincoln Island seem to be exempt from common law?"

"That is difficult to explain," replied the engineer. "However, I would be willing to admit that this peculiarity is due to the island's location in the southern hemisphere, which, as you know, my child, is colder than the northern hemisphere."

— Indeed, said Harbert, and floating ice is found at lower latitudes in the south than in the north of the Pacific.

"That is true," replied Pencroff, "and when I was a whaler, I saw icebergs as far as Cape Horn."

"Perhaps then," said Gideon Spilett, "we could explain the severe cold that strikes Lincoln Island by the presence of ice or ice floes at a relatively very close distance."

“Your opinion is quite valid, indeed, my dear Spilett,” replied Cyrus Smith, “and it is evidently to the proximity of the ice pack that we owe our harsh winters. I would also point out that a purely physical cause makes the southern hemisphere colder than the northern hemisphere. For since the sun is closer to this hemisphere during the summer, it is necessarily farther away during the winter. This explains the temperature difference in both directions, and if we find the winters very cold on Lincoln Island, let us not forget that the summers there are, on the contrary, very hot.”

"But why, please, Mr. Smith," asked Pencroff, frowning, "why is our hemisphere, as you say, so unequally divided? It's not fair!"

“My friend Pencroff,” replied the engineer, laughing, “right or wrong, we must accept the situation, and here’s the reason for this peculiarity. The Earth doesn’t describe a circle around the sun, but rather an ellipse, as dictated by the laws of rational mechanics. The Earth occupies one of the foci of the ellipse, and consequently, at a certain point in its orbit, it is at its apogee, that is, at its greatest distance from the sun, and at another point, at its perigee, that is, at its closest point. Now, it so happens that it is precisely during the winter of the southern regions that it is at its farthest point from the sun, and consequently, in the conditions necessary for these regions to experience the coldest temperatures. There’s nothing to be done about it, and men, Pencroff, however learned they may be, will never be able to change anything in the cosmographic order established by God himself.”

"And yet," added Pencroff, who showed some difficulty in resigning himself to this, "the world is indeed very learned! What a large book, Mr. Cyrus, one could make with all that we know!"

"And what a bigger book there could be with all that we don't know," replied Cyrus Smith.

Finally, for one reason or another, the month of June brought back the cold with its usual violence, and the colonists were mostly confined to Granite-House.

Ah! This sequestration seemed hard on all of them, and perhaps more particularly on Gideon Spilett.

“You see,” he said to Nab one day, “I would gladly give you, by notarial deed, all the inheritances that are due to come to me one day, if you were good enough to go anywhere and subscribe me to some newspaper! Truly, what I lack most for my happiness is knowing every morning what happened the day before, somewhere other than here!”

Nab started laughing.

"Well," he replied, "what occupies me is the daily grind!"

The truth is that, both internally and externally, there was no shortage of work.

The Lincoln Island colony was then at its peak of prosperity, the result of three years of sustained work. The incident of the destroyed brig had been a new source of wealth. Not to mention the complete rigging for the ship under construction, utensils and tools of all kinds, weapons and ammunition, clothing and instruments now filled the stores at Granite House. It was no longer even necessary to resort to making heavy felt cloth. If the colonists had suffered from the cold

during their first winter, now the harsh season could come without them having to fear its rigors. Linen was also plentiful and, moreover, was cared for with extreme care. From this sodium chloride, which is nothing other than sea salt, Cyrus Smith had easily extracted soda and chlorine. The soda, which was easily transformed into sodium carbonate, and the chlorine, from which he made chlorides of calcium and other compounds, were used for various domestic purposes, and especially for bleaching linen. Moreover, they only did four loads of laundry a year, as was the practice in the old days in families, and it may be added that Pencroff and Gédéon Spilett, while waiting for the postman to bring him his newspaper, proved themselves to be distinguished launderers.

Thus passed the winter months of June, July, and August. They were very harsh, and the average temperature recorded was no more than eight degrees Fahrenheit (13.33 degrees Celsius below zero). This was lower than the temperature of the previous winter. What a fine fire blazed incessantly in the chimneys of Granite House, its smoke streaking the granite wall with long black lines! No fuel was spared, as it grew quite naturally just a few steps away. Furthermore, the surplus of timber intended for the ship's construction allowed for savings on coal, which would have required a more arduous transport.

Men and animals were all doing well. Master Jup was a little chilly, it must be admitted.

That was perhaps his only fault, and he needed a good, well-padded dressing gown. But what a servant he was—skillful, zealous, tireless, not indiscreet, not talkative—and he could rightly have been proposed as a model to all his bipedal colleagues in the Old and New Worlds!

"After that," said Pencroff, "when you have four hands at your service, it's the least you can do your job properly!"

And, in fact, the intelligent quadruped did it well!

During the seven months that passed since the last searches around the mountain, and throughout September, which brought back the fine weather, there was no mention whatsoever of the island's spirit. Its influence was not manifested under any circumstances. It is true that it would have been useless, for no incident occurred that could have put the colonists to any difficult test.

Cyrus Smith even observed that if, by chance, communication between the stranger and the inhabitants of Granite House had ever been established through the granite massif, and if Top's instinct had, so to speak, sensed it, nothing of the sort occurred during this period. The dog's growling had completely ceased, as had the orangutan's restlessness. The two friends—for they were—no longer prowled at the

mouth of the inner well, they no longer barked or whimpered in that peculiar way which had, from the beginning, awakened the engineer. But could he be certain that all had been said about this enigma, and that he would never solve it? Could he affirm that some circumstance would not recur, which would bring the mysterious figure back into the picture? Who knew what the future held? Finally, winter ended; but an event, the consequences of which could be serious, occurred precisely in the first days that marked the return of spring.

On September 7, Cyrus Smith, having observed the summit of Mount Franklin, saw smoke swirling above the crater, the first vapors of which were being projected into the air.

CHAPTER XV

The settlers, warned by the engineer, had suspended their work and were silently contemplating the summit of Mount Franklin.

The volcano had awakened, and the vapors had pierced the mineral layer piled up at the bottom of the crater. But would the subterranean fires cause a violent eruption? That was a possibility that could not be foreseen.

However, even assuming the possibility of an eruption, it was likely that Lincoln Island as a whole would not be affected. Volcanic outbursts

are not always disastrous. The island had already experienced this, as evidenced by the lava flows that streaked the northern slopes of the mountain. Furthermore, the shape of the crater, with its opening at the top, would have ejected the ejected material away from the fertile parts of the island.

However, the past did not necessarily predict the future. Often, at the summits of volcanoes, old craters close and new ones open. This has happened in both worlds, at Etna, Popocatépelt, and Orizaba, and on the eve of an eruption, anything is possible. In short, a simple earthquake—a phenomenon that sometimes accompanies volcanic eruptions—was enough to alter the mountain's internal structure and create new pathways for the incandescent lava.

Cyrus Smith explained these things to his companions, and, without exaggerating the situation, he made them aware of the pros and cons.

After all, there was nothing that could be done. Granite House, barring an earthquake that shook the ground, seemed unlikely to be threatened. But the corral would have everything to fear if some new crater were to open in the southern slopes of Mount Franklin. From that day on, the vapors continued to plume from the mountaintop, and it was even possible to observe that they were growing in height and thickness, without any flames mingling with their thick plumes. The

phenomenon was still concentrated in the lower part of the central chimney.

However, with the arrival of warmer weather, work resumed. Construction of the ship was accelerated as much as possible, and, using the sluice gate, Cyrus Smith managed to set up a water-powered sawmill that more quickly cut tree trunks into planks and beams. The mechanism of this machine was as simple as those used in the rustic sawmills of Norway. A first horizontal movement to impart to the piece of wood, a second vertical movement to the saw—that was all that was required, and the engineer achieved this by means of a wheel, two cylinders, and pulleys, conveniently arranged.

Towards the end of September, the hull of the ship, which was to be rigged as a schooner, stood on the construction site. The framing was almost entirely finished, and all the frames having been held in place by a temporary centering, the shape of the vessel could already be appreciated.

This schooner, sleek at the bow and very free-flowing at the stern, would obviously be well-suited to a fairly long voyage, if necessary; but laying the planking, the interior lining, and the deck would still require a considerable amount of time. Fortunately, the ironwork from the old brig had been salvaged after the underwater explosion. From the

mutilated planks and curves, Pencroff and Ayrton had pulled out the pegs and a large quantity of copper nails. This saved the blacksmiths a lot of work, but the carpenters had a great deal to do.

Construction work had to be interrupted for a week for the harvest, haymaking, and bringing in the various crops that were plentiful on the Grande-vue plateau. With this task completed, all time was then devoted to finishing the schooner.

When night fell, the workers were truly exhausted. To avoid wasting time, they had changed their mealtimes: they ate lunch at noon and only supper when daylight began to fade. They would then return to Granite House and hasten to bed. Sometimes, however, conversation, when it turned to some interesting topic, delayed sleep somewhat. The colonists would talk about the future and readily discuss the changes a voyage of the schooner to the nearest land would bring to their situation. But amidst these plans, the thought of a future return to Lincoln Island always prevailed. They would never abandon this colony, founded with such effort and success, and to which communication with America would give new impetus.

Pencroff and Nab especially hoped to end their days there.

"Harbert," said the sailor, "you will never abandon Lincoln Island?"

— Never, Pencroff, and especially if you decide to stay there!

"He's all taken, my boy," replied Pencroff, "I'll wait for you! You'll bring me your wife and children, and I'll make famous fellows of your little ones!"

"That's settled," replied Harbert, laughing and blushing at the same time.

"And you, Mr. Cyrus," Pencroff continued enthusiastically, "you will always be the governor of the island! Ah, yes! How many inhabitants will it be able to support? Ten thousand, at least!"

They chatted like this, letting Pencroff go, and, from one conversation to the next, the reporter ended up founding a newspaper, the New Lincoln Herald! Such is the nature of the human heart. The need to create something lasting, something that outlives him, is the sign of his superiority over all that lives here below. This is what established his dominion, and this is what justifies it throughout the world.

After that, who knows if Jup and Top didn't also have their own little dreams for the future?

Ayrton, silent, told himself he longed to see Lord Glenarvan again and appear before everyone, rehabilitated. One evening, October 15th, the conversation, begun with these hypotheses, had gone on longer than usual. It was nine o'clock in the evening. Long, poorly concealed yawns

already signaled the time for rest, and Pencroff had just headed towards his bed when the electric bell in the room suddenly rang.

They were all there: Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Ayrton, Pencroff, Nab. So none of the colonists were at the corral.

Cyrus Smith had stood up. His companions looked at each other, thinking they had misheard.

"What does this mean?" cried Nab. "Is it the devil ringing?"

No one answered.

"The weather is stormy," Harbert observed. "Couldn't the influence of electricity..."

Harbert did not finish his sentence. The engineer, towards whom all eyes were turned, shook his head negatively.

“Let’s wait,” said Gideon Spilett. “If it’s a signal, whoever gives it, they’ll repeat it.”

"But who do you expect it to be?" cried Nab.

"But," replied Pencroff, "the one who..."

The sailor's sentence was interrupted by a new shudder of the tremolo on the gong.

Cyrus Smith walked over to the device and, sending the current through the wire, he transmitted this request to the corral:

"What do you want?" A few moments later, the needle, moving on the alphabetical dial, gave this answer to the guests of Granite-House:

"Come to the corral quickly."

"Finally!" exclaimed Cyrus Smith.

Yes! Finally! The mystery was about to be revealed! Faced with this immense interest that would draw them to the corral, all the colonists' fatigue had vanished, all need for rest had ceased. Without uttering a word, in a few moments, they had left Granite House and were on the shore. Only Jup and Top remained. They were not needed.

The night was black. The moon, new that very day, had disappeared at the same time as the sun.

As Harbert had observed, large storm clouds formed a low, heavy canopy that blocked out any starlight. A few heat flashes, reflections of a distant storm, illuminated the horizon.

It was possible that, a few hours later, lightning would strike the island itself. It was a threatening night.

But the darkness, however deep it was, could not stop people accustomed to this road to the corral.

They went up the left bank of the Mercy, reached the plateau, crossed the bridge over Glycerin Creek and advanced through the forest.

They walked briskly, gripped by intense emotion. For them, there was no doubt: they were finally going to learn the long-sought key to the enigma, the name of this mysterious being, so deeply involved in their lives, so generous in his influence, so powerful in his actions! Indeed, must not this stranger have been intertwined with their existence, known every detail, heard everything said at Granite House, in order to have always acted at the perfect moment?

Each one, lost in their thoughts, quickened their pace.

Beneath this canopy of trees, the darkness was so profound that the edge of the road was completely invisible. There was no sound in the forest. Animals and birds, influenced by the oppressive atmosphere, were motionless and silent. Not a breath stirred the leaves. Only the settlers' footsteps echoed in the shadows, on the hardened ground.

The silence, during the first quarter of an hour's walk, was broken only by this observation from Pencroff:

"We should have taken a lantern."

And this was the engineer's response:

"We'll find one in the corral."

Cyrus Smith and his companions had left Granite House at 9:12. By 9:47, they had covered three miles of the five that separated the mouth

of the Mercy River from the corral. At that moment, great white flashes of lightning were bursting forth above the island, outlining the foliage in black. These intense flashes dazzled and blinded. The storm, of course, could not be long in unleashing its fury. The lightning gradually became faster and brighter. Distant rumblings rolled through the depths of the sky. The atmosphere was stifling.

The colonists moved forward as if driven by some irresistible force.

At a quarter past nine, a bright flash showed them the palisaded enclosure, and they had not yet crossed the gate when thunder burst forth with tremendous violence.

In an instant, the corral was crossed, and Cyrus Smith was standing in front of the house.

It was possible that the house was occupied by the unknown person, since the telegram must have been sent from the house itself. However, no light shone from the window.

The engineer knocked on the door.

No response.

Cyrus Smith opened the door, and the colonists entered the room, which was pitch black. Nab struck it with a lighter, and a moment later, the lantern was lit and carried to every corner of the room...

There was nobody there. Things were exactly as they had been left.

"Have we been fooled by an illusion?" murmured Cyrus Smith.

No! That wasn't possible! The telegram clearly stated: "Come to the corral immediately."

We approached the table that was specially designated for servicing the wire. Everything was in place, the battery and the box that contained it, as well as the receiver and transmitter device.

"Who was last here?" asked the engineer.

"Me, Mr. Smith," replied Ayrton.

— And it was?...

— Four days ago.

"Ah! A notice!" exclaimed Harbert, pointing to a piece of paper lying on the table.

Written on the paper were these words, in English: "Follow the new thread."

"On the way!" cried Cyrus Smith, who realized that the telegram had not come from the corral, but from the mysterious retreat which an additional wire, connected to the old one, linked directly to Granite-House.

Nab took the lit lantern, and they all left the corral.

The storm then raged with extreme violence. The interval between each flash of lightning and each clap of thunder decreased noticeably.

The meteor would soon dominate Mount Franklin and the entire island. In the flashing, intermittent light, the summit of the volcano, plumed with vapors, could be seen.

There was no telegraphic communication in the entire section of the corral that separated the house from the palisaded enclosure. But, after passing through the gate, the engineer, running straight to the first post, saw in the flash of light that a new wire was falling from the voting booth to the ground.

"There he is!" he said.

This wire lay on the ground, but along its entire length it was surrounded by an insulating substance, like a submarine cable, which ensured the free transmission of currents. By its direction, it seemed to enter through the woods and the southern foothills of the mountain, and, consequently, it ran westward.

"Let's follow him!" said Cyrus Smith.

And sometimes by the light of the lantern, sometimes amidst flashes of lightning, the colonists set off on the path traced by the wire.

The thunderous rumbles were continuous then, and so violent that no words could be heard. Besides, the point wasn't to speak, but to advance.

Cyrus Smith and his men first climbed the buttress rising between the valley of the corral and that of the river of the falls, which they crossed at its narrowest point. The wire, sometimes stretched over the lower branches of the trees, sometimes unspooling on the ground, guided them surely.

The engineer had surmised that this wire might stop at the bottom of the valley, and that there would be the unknown retreat.

It was not to be. They had to climb back up the southwestern spur and descend again onto that arid plateau, which ended at that wall of basalt so strangely piled up. From time to time, one or another of the settlers bent down, felt the thread with their hand, and corrected the direction if necessary. But there was no longer any doubt that the thread ran directly to the sea.

There, no doubt, in some depth of the igneous rocks, lay the dwelling so vainly sought until then.

The sky was ablaze. Lightning flashed in quick succession. Several struck the volcano's summit and plunged into the crater amidst thick smoke. At times, it seemed as if the mountain itself was spewing flames.

At a few minutes to ten, the settlers had arrived at the high escarpment overlooking the ocean to the west. The wind had risen. The surf roared five hundred feet below.

Cyrus Smith calculated that he and his companions had covered a distance of one and a half miles from the corral.

At this point, the wire entered the middle of the rocks, following the rather steep slope of a narrow and capriciously traced ravine.

The colonists ventured down, risking a landslide of unstable boulders and being swept into the sea. The descent was extremely perilous, but they disregarded the danger; they were no longer in control of themselves, and an irresistible attraction drew them toward that mysterious point, like a magnet attracts iron. So they descended almost unconsciously into the ravine, which, even in full sunlight, would have been virtually impassable. The stones rolled and glittered like flaming meteors as they passed through the patches of light. Cyrus Smith was in the lead. Ayrton brought up the rear.

Here they proceeded step by step; there they slid over the polished rock; then they stood up and continued on their way. Finally, the wire, making a sharp angle, touched the coastal rocks, a veritable scattering of reefs that the high tides would pound. The settlers had reached the lower limit of the basalt wall.

There, a narrow shoulder developed, running horizontally and parallel to the sea. The line followed it, and the settlers entered it. They had not gone a hundred paces before the shoulder, sloping gently down, reached the very level of the waves.

The engineer grasped the thread, and he saw that it was sinking into the sea.

His companions, standing near him, were stunned. A cry of disappointment, almost a cry of despair, escaped them! Should they then plunge beneath these waters and search for some underwater cavern? In their state of heightened mental and physical excitement, they would not have hesitated. A thought from the engineer stopped them.

Cyrus Smith led his companions under a crevice in the rocks, and there:

"Let's wait," he said. "The sea is high. At low tide, the way will be open."

"But who can make you believe...?" asked Pencroff.

"He wouldn't have called us if we lacked the means to reach him!"

Cyrus Smith had spoken with such conviction that no objection was raised.

His observation, moreover, was logical. It had to be admitted that an opening, usable at low tide, which the floodwaters were currently blocking, was opening at the foot of the wall.

It was a few hours of waiting. So the settlers remained silently huddled under a kind of deep portico, carved into the rock. The rain began to fall, and soon the clouds, torn by lightning, condensed into torrents. The echoes reverberated the crash of thunder, giving it a magnificent sound.

The colonists' emotion was extreme. A thousand strange, supernatural thoughts crossed their minds, and they evoked some great and superhuman apparition which alone could have corresponded to the idea they had of the mysterious genius of the island.

At midnight, Cyrus Smith, carrying the lantern, went down to the level of the shore to observe the arrangement of the rocks. The tide had already been out for two hours.

The engineer had not been mistaken. The arch of a vast excavation was beginning to take shape above the water. There, the wire, bending at a right angle, entered this gaping maw.

Cyrus Smith returned to his companions and simply said to them:

"In one hour, the opening will be usable."

"So it exists?" asked Pencroff.

"Did you doubt it?" replied Cyrus Smith.

"But this cavern will be filled with water up to a certain height," Harbert observed.

"Either this cavern dries out completely," replied Cyrus Smith, "and in that case we will traverse it on foot, or it does not dry out, and some means of transport will be made available to us."

An hour passed. They all went down to sea level in the rain. In three hours, the tide had dropped fifteen feet. The apex of the arch formed by the vault was at least eight feet above its level. It was like the arch of a bridge, under which the waters, mingled with foam, flowed. Bending over, the engineer saw a black object floating on the surface of the sea. He pulled it towards him.

It was a canoe, moored by a rope to some inner projection of the wall. This canoe was made of bolted sheet metal. Two oars were at the bottom, under the benches.

"Let's embark," said Cyrus Smith.

A moment later, the settlers were in the canoe.

Nab and Ayrton had taken up the oars, Pencroff at the helm. Cyrus Smith at the front, the lantern placed on the bow, illuminated the way.

The very low vault under which the boat first passed rose abruptly; but the darkness was too profound, and the light from the lantern too weak, to discern the extent of this cavern, its width, its height, its depth. In the midst of this basaltic substructure reigned an imposing silence.

No noise from the outside penetrated it, and flashes of lightning could not pierce its thick walls.

In a few parts of the globe, there exist these immense caverns, a kind of natural crypt dating back to its geological era. Some are flooded by seawater; others contain entire lakes within their walls.

Like Fingal's Cave on the island of Staffa, one of the Hebrides, like the caves of Morgat on the Bay of Douarnenez in Brittany, the caves of Bonifacio in Corsica, those of Lysefjord in Norway, like the immense mammoth cave in Kentucky, five hundred feet high and more than twenty miles long! In several places around the globe, nature has carved out these crypts and preserved them for the admiration of man.

As for this cavern that the colonists were exploring, did it extend to the center of the island? For the past fifteen minutes, the canoe had been making detours, which the engineer indicated to Pencroff in a curt voice, when, at a certain point:

"Further to the right!" he commanded.

The boat, changing its course, immediately came alongside the right-hand wall. The engineer rightly wanted to determine if the line still ran along that wall.

The thread was there, hanging from the protrusions of the rock.

"Forward!" said Cyrus Smith.

And the two oars, plunging into the dark waters, lifted the boat out of the water.

The canoe traveled for another quarter of an hour, and, since the opening of the cavern, it must have covered a distance of half a mile, when the voice of Cyrus Smith was heard again.

"Stop!" he said.

The canoe stopped, and the colonists saw a bright light illuminating the enormous crypt, so deeply dug into the bowels of the island.

It was then possible to examine this cavern, the existence of which had been completely unsuspected.

At a height of one hundred feet, a vault curved, supported by basalt columns that all seemed to have been cast from the same mold. Irregular thrusts and whimsical ribs rested upon these columns, which nature had erected by the thousands in the earliest epochs of the Earth's formation. The basalt sections, fitted one inside the other,

measured forty to fifty feet in height, and the water, calm despite the turmoil outside, lapped at their base. The brilliance of the light source, pointed out by the engineer, seized each prismatic edge and pierced them with points of fire, penetrating the walls as if they were diaphanous, and transformed the slightest projections of this substructure into so many sparkling cabochons.

As a result of a reflection phenomenon, the water reproduced these various flashes on its surface, so that the canoe appeared to float between two sparkling zones.

There was no mistaking the nature of the radiation projected by the luminous center, whose rays, clear and straight, broke at all angles, at all the ribs of the crypt.

This light came from an electrical source, and its white color betrayed its origin. This was the sun of the cavern, and it filled it entirely. At a signal from Cyrus Smith, the oars fell back, sending up a veritable shower of carbuncles, and the canoe headed toward the luminous focus, from which it was soon only half a cable's length away. At this point, the width of the water's surface measured about three hundred and fifty feet, and beyond the dazzling center, one could see an enormous basalt wall that closed off all exit from that side. The cavern had thus widened considerably, and the sea formed a small lake within it. But the vault,

the side walls, the apse wall—all these prisms, all these cylinders, all these cones—were bathed in the electric fluid, to such an extent that this brilliance seemed inherent to them, and one might have said of these stones, cut with facets like priceless diamonds, that they exuded light! In the center of the lake, a long, spindle-shaped object floated on the surface of the water, silent and motionless. The brilliance emanating from it escaped from its sides, as from two furnace mouths heated with brazing iron. This apparatus, resembling the body of an enormous cetacean, was about two hundred and fifty feet long and rose ten to twelve feet above sea level.

The boat approached slowly. At the bow, Cyrus Smith had stood up. He was watching, visibly agitated. Then, suddenly, seizing the reporter's arm:

"But it's him! It can only be him!" he cried, "him!..."

Then he fell back onto his bench, murmuring a name that only Gideon Spilett could hear.

No doubt the reporter knew the name, for it had a prodigious effect on him, and he replied in a low voice:

"Him! An outlaw!"

"Him!" said Cyrus Smith.

On the engineer's orders, the boat approached this unusual floating device. The boat came alongside the left hip, from which a beam of light shone through a thick pane of glass.

Cyrus Smith and his companions climbed onto the platform. A gaping hatch lay there. They all rushed through the opening. At the bottom of the ladder, an electrically lit interior walkway was visible. At the end of this walkway, a door opened, which Cyrus Smith pushed open. A richly decorated room, which the colonists quickly crossed, led to a library, where a luminous ceiling poured a torrent of light. At the far end of the library, a large door, also closed, was opened by the engineer. A vast hall, a kind of museum where works of art and marvels of industry were piled up alongside all the treasures of mineral nature, appeared before the colonists, who must have felt as if they had been magically transported into a dream world.

Lying on a rich divan, they saw a man who did not seem to notice their presence.

Then Cyrus Smith raised his voice, and, to the extreme surprise of his companions, he uttered these words:

"Captain Nemo, you asked for us? Here we are."

CHAPTER XVI

At these words, the man lying down got up, and his face appeared in full light: a magnificent head, a high forehead, a proud gaze, a white beard, abundant hair swept back.

The man leaned his hand on the back of the sofa he had just left. His gaze was calm. One could see that a slow illness had gradually worn him down, but his voice still seemed strong when he said in English, in a tone that betrayed extreme surprise:

"I have no name, sir."

"I know you!" replied Cyrus Smith.

Captain Nemo fixed an ardent gaze on the engineer, as if he wanted to annihilate him.

Then, falling back onto the sofa cushions:

"What does it matter, after all," he murmured, "I'm going to die!"

Cyrus Smith approached Captain Nemo, and Gideon Spilett took his hand, which he found burning hot. Ayrton, Pencroff, Harbert, and Nab stood respectfully apart in a corner of the magnificent salon, the air of which was saturated with electric emanations.

However, Captain Nemo immediately withdrew his hand, and with a gesture he asked the engineer and the reporter to sit down.

They all gazed at him with genuine emotion. So this was the one they called the "genius of the island," the powerful being whose intervention had been so effective in so many circumstances, this benefactor to whom they owed such a great deal of gratitude! Before their eyes, they saw only a man, where Pencroff and Nab had believed they had found almost a god, and this man was ready to die!

But how did Cyrus Smith know Captain Nemo? Why had he jumped up so quickly upon hearing that name, which he must have thought was unknown to everyone?...

The captain had taken his place back on the sofa, and, leaning on his arm, he was looking at the engineer, who was standing next to him.

"Do you know the name I used to bear, sir?" he asked.

"I know that," replied Cyrus Smith, "just as I know the name of that admirable underwater machine..."

"The Nautilus?" said the captain, half-smiling.

— The Nautilus.

— But do you know... do you know who I am?

— I know.

— Yet for thirty years I have had no communication with the inhabited world, thirty years I have lived in the depths of the sea, the

only environment where I have found independence! Who could have betrayed my secret?

— A man who had never made any commitment to you, Captain Nemo, and who, therefore, cannot be accused of treason.

— This Frenchman whom chance threw onto my board sixteen years ago?

— Himself.

— So this man and his two companions did not perish in the Maelstrom, where the Nautilus had entered?

— They did not perish, and a work containing your story was published under the title of Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.

"My story is only a few months old, sir!" replied the captain briskly.

"That's true," Cyrus Smith continued, "but a few months of this strange life have been enough to make you known..."

"Like a great criminal, no doubt?" replied Captain Nemo, a haughty smile playing on his lips. "Yes, a rebel, perhaps even an outcast from humanity!"

The engineer did not reply.

"Well, sir?"

“I have no right to judge Captain Nemo,” replied Cyrus Smith, “at least not concerning his past life. I know not, like everyone else, what the motives for this strange existence were, and I cannot judge the effects without knowing the causes; but what I do know is that a benevolent hand has constantly been extended over us since our arrival at Lincoln Island, that we all owe our lives to a good, generous, and powerful being, and that this powerful, generous, and good being is you, Captain Nemo!”

"It's me," the captain replied simply.

The engineer and the reporter had stood up. Their companions had drawn closer, and the gratitude overflowing in their hearts was about to be expressed through gestures and words... Captain Nemo stopped them with a sign, and in a voice more moved than he probably intended:

"When you have heard me," he said.

And the captain, in a few clear and concise sentences, revealed his entire life story.

His story was brief, and yet he had to summon all his remaining energy to tell it to the end. It was evident that he was struggling against extreme weakness. Several times, Cyrus Smith urged him to get some

rest, but he shook his head like a man to whom tomorrow no longer belonged, and when the reporter offered him care:

"They are useless," he replied, "my days are numbered."

Captain Nemo was an Indian, Prince Dakkar, son of a rajah from the then-independent territory of Bundelkund and nephew of the Indian hero Tipu Sultan. His father sent him to Europe at the age of ten to receive a thorough education, secretly hoping that he might one day fight on equal terms with those he considered the oppressors of his country. From the age of ten to thirty, the exceptionally gifted Prince Dakkar, magnanimous in heart and mind, pursued his studies in all areas, reaching great heights in the sciences, literature, and arts.

Prince Dakkar traveled throughout Europe. His birth and fortune made him sought after, but the allurements of the world never attracted him.

Young and handsome, he remained serious, somber, consumed by a thirst for knowledge, with an implacable resentment riveted to his heart.

Prince Dakkar hated. He hated the only country he had never wanted to set foot in, the only nation whose advances he constantly refused: he hated England, and all the more so because he admired her in more ways than one.

This Indian embodied all the fierce hatreds of the vanquished against the victor.

The invader had been unable to find favor with the invaded.

The son of one of those sovereigns whose servitude the United Kingdom could only nominally ensure, this prince, from the family of Tippu-Saib, raised in the ideas of claim and revenge, having the inescapable love of his poetic country burdened with English chains, never wanted to set foot on this land which he cursed, to which India owed its enslavement.

Prince Dakkar became an artist nobly impressed by the wonders of art, a scholar to whom nothing of the higher sciences was foreign, a statesman who was formed amidst the courts of Europe. In the eyes of those who observed him only superficially, he might have appeared to be one of those cosmopolitans, curious to know but disdainful of action, one of those opulent travelers, proud and Platonic spirits, who ceaselessly roam the world and belong to no country.

Nothing could be further from the truth. This artist, this scholar, this man remained Indian at heart, Indian in his thirst for revenge, Indian in the hope he cherished of one day reclaiming his country's rights, of driving out the foreigners, of restoring its independence. And so, Prince Dakkar returned to Bundelkund in 1849. He married an Indian

noblewoman whose heart, like his own, grieved for the misfortunes of her homeland. They had two children whom he adored. But domestic happiness could not make him forget the subjugation of India. He waited for an opportunity. It presented itself.

The English yoke had perhaps become too heavy on the Hindu populations. Prince Dakkar took up the voice of the discontented. He instilled in them all the hatred he felt for foreigners. He traveled not only through the still independent regions of the Indian peninsula, but also through the areas directly under English administration. He recalled the glorious days of Tipu Sultan, who died heroically at Seringapatam in defense of his homeland. In 1857, the great Sepoy Rebellion broke out. Prince Dakkar was its driving force. He organized the immense uprising. He placed his talents and his wealth at the service of this cause. He risked his life; he fought in the front lines; he risked his life like the humblest of those heroes who had risen up to liberate their country. He was wounded ten times in twenty encounters and had not been killed when the last soldiers of independence fell under English bullets.

Never before had British power in India been in such danger, and if, as they had hoped, the sepoys had found help outside, it might have been the end of the influence and domination of the United Kingdom in Asia.

The name of Prince Dakkar was illustrious then. The hero who bore it did not hide and fought openly. A price was put on his head, and, if no traitor was found to deliver it, his father, his mother, his wife, and his children paid for him even before he could know the dangers they faced because of him...

Right, once again, had fallen before force. But civilization never retreats, and it seems to borrow all rights from necessity. The sepoys were defeated, and the land of the ancient rajahs fell once more under the stricter rule of England.

Prince Dakkar, who could not die, returned to the Bundelkund mountains. There, alone now, filled with immense disgust for everything that bore the name of man, hating and horrified the civilized world, wanting to flee it forever, he gathered the remnants of his fortune, reunited about twenty of his most faithful companions, and, one day, they all disappeared.

Where had Prince Dakkar gone to find this independence that the inhabited world denied him?

Under the waters, in the depths of the seas, where no one could follow him.

The scientist replaced the warrior. A deserted island in the Pacific served as his shipyard, and there, a submarine was built according to

his plans. Electricity, whose immeasurable mechanical power he had harnessed by means that will one day be known, and which he drew from inexhaustible sources, was employed for all the needs of his floating apparatus: as motive power, lighting, and heating. The sea, with its infinite treasures, its myriad fish, its harvests of kelp and sargassum, its enormous mammals, and not only all that nature sustained there, but also all that men had lost there, amply sufficed for the needs of the prince and his crew—and this was the fulfillment of his most ardent desire, since he wished to have no further contact with land. He named his underwater craft the Nautilus, called himself Captain Nemo, and disappeared beneath the seas.

For many years, the captain explored all the oceans, from pole to pole. An outcast in the inhabited world, he amassed remarkable treasures in these unknown realms. The millions lost in Vigo Bay in 1702 by Spanish galleons provided him with an inexhaustible source of riches, which he always used, anonymously, to benefit peoples fighting for their countries' independence. Finally, he had long been without any contact with his fellow humans when, during the night of November 6, 1866, three men were thrown overboard. They were a French professor, his servant, and a Canadian fisherman. These three men had been swept

into the sea in a collision between the Nautilus and the American frigate Abraham Lincoln, which was pursuing it.

Captain Nemo learned from this professor that the Nautilus, sometimes mistaken for a giant mammal of the cetacean family, sometimes for a submarine containing a crew of pirates, was being pursued on all the seas.

Captain Nemo could have returned these three men to the ocean, whom chance had thus cast into his mysterious existence. He did not; he kept them prisoner, and for seven months they were able to contemplate all the wonders of a voyage that continued for twenty thousand leagues under the sea. One day, on June 22, 1867, these three men, who knew nothing of Captain Nemo's past, managed to escape after seizing the Nautilus's lifeboat. But as the Nautilus was at that moment being swept onto the Norwegian coast by the maelstrom's eddies, the captain must have believed that the fugitives, drowned in these terrifying currents, had perished at the bottom of the abyss. He was therefore unaware that the Frenchman and his two companions had been miraculously washed ashore, that fishermen from the Loffoden Islands had taken them in, and that the professor, upon his return to France, had published the work in which seven months of this

strange and adventurous voyage of the Nautilus were recounted and made available to public curiosity.

For a long time afterward, Captain Nemo continued to live like this, roaming the seas. But, little by little, his companions died and went to rest in their coral graveyard at the bottom of the Pacific. A void filled the Nautilus, and finally Captain Nemo remained alone of all those who had taken refuge with him in the depths of the ocean.

Captain Nemo was sixty years old at the time. When he was alone, he managed to bring his Nautilus back to one of the underwater ports that sometimes served as his stopping points.

One of these harbors was dug beneath Lincoln Island, and it was the one currently sheltering the Nautilus. For six years, the captain had been there, no longer sailing, awaiting death—that is, the moment when he would be reunited with his companions—when chance led him to witness the crash of the balloon carrying the Confederate prisoners. Clad in his diving suit, he was walking underwater, a few cables' lengths from the island's shore, when the engineer was plunged into the sea. A well-timed movement pulled the captain under... and he saved Cyrus Smith.

At first, he wanted to flee from these five shipwrecked men, but his port of refuge was closed, and, due to an uplift of the basalt caused by

volcanic activity, he could no longer pass through the entrance to the crypt. Where there was still enough water for a small boat to cross the bar, there was no longer enough for the Nautilus, whose draft was relatively considerable.

Captain Nemo remained, then observed these men cast helplessly onto a deserted island, but he did not want to be seen. Little by little, as he saw their honesty, their energy, their brotherly bonds, he became interested in their efforts. Almost against his will, he gleaned all the secrets of their lives. With the help of his diving suit, he easily reached the bottom of the inner shaft of Granite House, and, ascending the rocky overhangs to its upper opening, he listened to the colonists recount the past, study the present, and consider the future. He learned from them of America's immense struggle against America itself to abolish slavery. Yes! These men were worthy of reconciling Captain Nemo with the humanity they so honestly represented on the island!

Captain Nemo had saved Cyrus Smith. It was he who brought the dog back to the funnels, who threw Top from the lake, who beached the crate containing so many useful items for the colonists at the tip of the wreck, who sent the boat back up the Mercy River, who threw the rope from the top of Granite House during the monkey attack, who revealed Ayrton's presence on Tabor Island by means of the document in the

bottle, who blew up the brig with a torpedo placed at the bottom of the channel, who saved Harbert from certain death by bringing quinine sulfate, and finally, he who struck the convicts with those electric bullets whose secret he held and which he used in his underwater hunts. Thus were explained so many incidents that must have seemed supernatural, and which all attested to the captain's generosity and power.

However, this great misanthrope had a thirst for good.

He still had useful advice to give to his protégés, and, on the other hand, feeling his heart beating, returned to itself by the approaches of death, he summoned, as is known, the colonists of Granite-House, by means of a thread by which he connected the corral to the Nautilus, which was equipped with an alphabetic apparatus... Perhaps he would not have done so, if he had known that Cyrus Smith knew enough of his history to greet him by the name of Nemo.

The captain had finished telling the story of his life.

Cyrus Smith then spoke; he recalled all the incidents which had exerted such a salutary influence on the colony, and, on behalf of his companions as well as himself, he thanked the generous being to whom they owed so much.

But Captain Nemo had no intention of demanding payment for the services he had rendered. One last thought stirred in his mind, and before shaking the hand offered by the engineer:

"Now, sir," he said, "now that you know my life, judge it!"

In speaking thus, the captain was obviously alluding to a serious incident witnessed by the three foreigners thrown aboard his ship—an incident the French professor must have recounted in his work, and whose repercussions must have been terrible. Indeed, a few days before the professor and his two companions had fled, the Nautilus, pursued by a frigate in the North Atlantic, had rammed the frigate and sunk it mercilessly.

Cyrus Smith understood the allusion and remained silent.

"It was an English frigate, sir," cried Captain Nemo, who for a moment became Prince Dakkar again, "an English frigate, do you hear me! She was attacking me! I was squeezed into a narrow, shallow bay!... I had to get through, and... I got through!"

Then, in a calmer voice:

"I was within the bounds of justice and law," he added. "I did the good I could everywhere, and also the evil I had to do. Not all justice lies in forgiveness!"

A few moments of silence followed this reply, and Captain Nemo uttered the phrase again:

"What do you think of me, gentlemen?"

Cyrus Smith extended his hand to the captain, and, at his request, he replied in a grave voice:

"Captain, your mistake was believing that the past could be resurrected, and you fought against necessary progress. It was one of those errors that some admire, others condemn, of which God alone is the judge, and which human reason must absolve."

He who errs in an intention he believes to be good can be fought, but he is never to be esteemed. Your error is one that does not preclude admiration, and your name has nothing to fear from the judgments of history. History cherishes heroic follies, even as it condemns the consequences they bring about.

Captain Nemo's chest heaved, and his hand reached up towards the sky.

"Was I wrong, was I right?" he murmured.

Cyrus Smith continued:

"All great deeds come back to God, for they originate from Him! Captain Nemo, the honest people here, those you rescued, will mourn

you forever!"

Harbert had moved closer to the captain. He bent his knees, took his hand and kissed it. A tear slipped from the dying man's eye.

"My child," he said, "may you be blessed!"

CHAPTER XVII

Day had arrived. No ray of light penetrated the deep crypt. The high tide blocked its opening. But the artificial light that streamed in long beams through the walls of the Nautilus had not diminished, and the sheet of water still shimmered around the floating vessel. Captain Nemo was overcome by extreme fatigue and had fallen back onto the divan. There was no question of transporting him to Granite House, for he had expressed his wish to remain amidst the marvels of the Nautilus, which millions could not have bought, and to await there a death that could not be far off.

During a rather long period of prostration that left him almost unconscious, Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett carefully observed the sick man's condition. It was evident that the captain was gradually fading away. Strength was failing that once so robust body, now a frail vessel for a soul about to depart. All life was concentrated in his heart and head.

The engineer and the reporter had consulted each other in hushed tones. Was there any care to be given to this dying man? Could they, if not save him, at least prolong his life for a few days? He himself had said that there was no remedy, and he calmly awaited death, which he did not fear.

“We can do nothing,” said Gideon Spilett.

"But what is he dying of?" asked Pencroff.

"He's gone," replied the reporter.

— However, continued the sailor, if we carried him out into the open air, into the full sun, perhaps he would revive?

“No, Pencroff,” replied the engineer, “there’s no point in trying! Besides, Captain Nemo wouldn’t agree to leave his ship. He’s lived on the Nautilus for thirty years, and it’s on the Nautilus that he wants to die.”

Captain Nemo undoubtedly heard Cyrus Smith's reply, for he sat up a little, and in a weaker but still intelligible voice:

“You are right, sir,” he said. “I must and I want to die here. Therefore, I have a request to make of you.”

Cyrus Smith and his companions had moved closer to the divan, and they arranged the cushions so that the dying man was better supported.

Then we could see his gaze rest upon all the wonders of this room, lit by electric rays filtered through the arabesques of a luminous ceiling. He looked, one after the other, at the paintings hanging from the splendid tapestries on the walls, these masterpieces of Italian, Flemish, French and Spanish masters, the marble and bronze reductions that stood on their pedestals, the magnificent organ against the rear wall, then the display cases arranged around a central basin, in which flourished the most admirable products of the sea, marine plants, zoophytes, strings of pearls of inestimable value, and, finally, his eyes rested on this motto inscribed on the pediment of this museum, the motto of the Nautilus: mobilis in mobile.

It seemed that he wanted to gaze one last time upon these masterpieces of art and nature, to which he had limited his horizon during a stay of so many years in the abyss of the seas!

Cyrus Smith respected Captain Nemo's silence. He waited for the dying man to speak again.

After a few minutes, during which he undoubtedly saw his entire life flash before his eyes, Captain Nemo turned back to the colonists and said to them:

"Do you believe, gentlemen, that you owe me any gratitude?...

— Captain, we would give our lives to prolong yours!

"Good," Captain Nemo continued, "good!... Promise me that you will carry out my last wishes, and I will be paid for everything I have done for you."

"We promise you," replied Cyrus Smith.

And, by this promise, he bound himself and his companions.

"Gentlemen," the captain continued, "tomorrow I will be dead."

He stopped Harbert with a gesture, who wanted to protest.

"Tomorrow I will be dead, and I wish to have no other tomb than the Nautilus. It is my coffin! All my friends rest at the bottom of the seas, I want to rest there too."

A profound silence greeted Captain Nemo's words.

“Listen to me carefully, gentlemen,” he continued. “The Nautilus is imprisoned in this cave, whose entrance has been raised. But, if it cannot leave its prison, it can at least plunge into the abyss it covers and keep my mortal remains there.”

The colonists listened reverently to the dying man's words.

“Tomorrow, after my death, Mr. Smith,” the captain continued, “you and your companions will leave the Nautilus, for all the riches it contains must perish with me. Only one memento of Prince Dakkar, whose story you now know, will remain with you. This casket… there…

contains millions of diamonds, most of them souvenirs from the time when, as a father and husband, I almost believed in happiness, and a collection of pearls gathered by my friends and me from the depths of the sea. With this treasure, you will be able to do good things one day. In hands like yours and those of your companions, Mr. Smith, money cannot be a danger. I will therefore be, from up there, associated with your works, and I do not fear them!”

After a few moments of rest, necessitated by his extreme weakness, Captain Nemo resumed in these terms:

"Tomorrow, you will take this box, you will leave this room, and you will close the door; then, you will go back up onto the platform of the Nautilus, and you will close the hood, which you will secure with its bolts.

"We will, Captain," replied Cyrus Smith.

"Good. You will then board the boat that brought you. But before leaving the Nautilus, go to the stern and open two large valves located on the waterline. Water will enter the tanks, and the Nautilus will gradually sink beneath the waves to rest at the bottom of the abyss."

And, at a gesture from Cyrus Smith, the captain added:

"Do not be afraid! You will only be burying a dead man!"

Neither Cyrus Smith nor any of his companions would have thought it necessary to make a comment to Captain Nemo. These were his last wishes that he was conveying to them, and they had no choice but to comply.

"I have your promise, gentlemen?" added Captain Nemo.

"You have it, Captain," replied the engineer.

The captain gave a sign of thanks and asked the colonists to leave him alone for a few hours.

Gideon Spilett insisted on staying close to him, in case a crisis occurred, but the dying man refused, saying:

"I'll live until tomorrow, sir!"

They all left the living room, crossed the library, the dining room, and arrived at the front, in the engine room, where the electrical equipment was located, which, along with heat and light, provided mechanical power to the Nautilus.

The Nautilus was a masterpiece that contained masterpieces, and the engineer was amazed.

The colonists climbed onto the platform, which rose seven or eight feet above the water.

There, they lay down near a thick lenticular pane of glass that covered a kind of large eye from which a beam of light shone forth. Behind this eye was a hollowed-out cabin that contained the rudder wheels and in which the helmsman stood when he steered the Nautilus through the liquid layers, which the electric beams were to illuminate over a considerable distance.

Cyrus Smith and his companions remained silent at first, for they were deeply impressed by what they had just seen and heard, and their hearts sank when they thought that he whose arm had so often helped them, this protector whom they would have known for only a few hours, was on the verge of dying! Whatever judgment posterity might pronounce on the acts of this almost superhuman existence, Prince Dakkar would always remain one of those strange figures whose memory cannot be erased.

"Now that's a man!" said Pencroff. "Is it believable that he lived like that at the bottom of the ocean! And to think that he may not have found any more peace there than anywhere else!"

"The Nautilus," Ayrton then observed, "might have been able to help us leave Lincoln Island and reach some inhabited land."

"A thousand devils!" cried Pencroff, "I would never dare to steer such a ship. Sailing on the seas, fine! But under the seas, no!"

“I believe,” replied the reporter, “that maneuvering a submersible like this Nautilus must be very easy, Pencroff, and that we would quickly get used to it. No storms, no collisions to fear. A few feet below its surface, the waters of the sea are as calm as those of a lake.”

"Perhaps!" replied the sailor, "but I prefer a good gale of wind aboard a well-rigged ship. A boat is made to go on the water, not under it."

“My friends,” replied the engineer, “it is pointless, at least concerning the Nautilus, to discuss this question of submarines. The Nautilus does not belong to us, and we have no right to dispose of it. Besides, it could not be of any use to us whatsoever. Apart from the fact that it can no longer leave this cavern, the entrance to which is now blocked by an uplift of basalt rocks, Captain Nemo wants it to sink with him after his death. His wish is absolute, and we will carry it out.”

Cyrus Smith and his companions, after a conversation that continued for some time, went back down inside the Nautilus. There, they had some food and returned to the lounge.

Captain Nemo had emerged from the prostration that had overwhelmed him, and his eyes had regained their sparkle. A smile seemed to be forming on his lips.

The settlers approached him.

"Gentlemen," the captain told them, "you are courageous, honest, and good men. You have all devoted yourselves wholeheartedly to the common cause. I have often observed you. I have loved you, I love you!... your hand, Mr. Smith!"

Cyrus Smith extended his hand to the captain, who shook it affectionately.

"That's good!" he murmured.

Then, continuing:

"But that's enough about me! I need to talk to you about yourselves and Lincoln Island, where you've taken refuge... Do you intend to abandon it?"

"To get back to that, Captain!" replied Pencroff briskly.

"To return there?... Indeed, Pencroff," replied the captain with a smile, "I know how much you love this island. It has been transformed by your efforts, and it is truly yours!"

"Our plan, Captain," said Cyrus Smith, "would be to provide the United States with it and to establish a stopover for our navy there, which would be fortunately located in that part of the Pacific."

"You think of your country, gentlemen," replied the captain. "You work for its prosperity, for its glory. You are right. The fatherland!... that is

where one must return! That is where one must die!... and I, I am dying far from all that I have loved!"

"Would you have any last wishes to convey?" the engineer said briskly, "any memento to give to the friends you may have left behind in those mountains of India?"

“No, Mr. Smith. I have no friends left! I am the last of my kind… and I have long been dead to all those I once knew… but let us return to you. Solitude and isolation are sad things, beyond human strength… I am dying from having believed that one could live alone!… You must therefore do everything you can to leave Lincoln Island and see again the land where you were born. I know that those wretches destroyed the boat you had built…”

“We are building a ship,” said Gideon Spilett, “a ship large enough to carry us to the nearest land; but if we manage to leave it sooner or later, we will return to Lincoln Island. Too many memories bind us there for us ever to forget it!”

"This is where we will have known Captain Nemo," said Cyrus Smith.

"Only here will we find your memory in its entirety!" added Harbert.

"And it is here that I shall rest in eternal sleep, if..." replied the captain.

He hesitated, and instead of finishing his sentence, he simply said:

"Mr. Smith, I would like to speak to you... alone!"

Respecting the dying man's wishes, the engineer's companions withdrew.

Cyrus Smith remained locked up with Captain Nemo for only a few minutes, and soon he called his friends back, but he told them nothing of the secret things that the dying man had wanted to confide in him.

Gideon Spilett then observed the sick man with extreme attention. It was evident that the captain was now sustained only by moral strength, which would soon be unable to counteract his physical decline.

The day ended without any apparent change. The colonists did not leave the Nautilus for a moment. Night had fallen, although it was impossible to notice in this crypt.

Captain Nemo was not suffering, but he was declining. His noble face, pale with the approach of death, was calm. From his lips sometimes escaped almost inaudible words, relating to various incidents of his strange existence. One could sense that life was gradually withdrawing from his body, whose extremities were already cold. Once or twice more, he addressed the colonists gathered near him, and he smiled at them with that last smile that lingers even in death. Finally, a little after midnight, Captain Nemo made a final movement, and he managed to cross his arms over his chest, as if he wished to die in that position.

Around one in the morning, all life had taken refuge solely in his gaze. A final fire flickered beneath that pupil, from which so many flames had once sprung. Then, murmuring the words, "God and country!" he breathed his last.

Cyrus Smith, bowing then, closed the eyes of the one who had been Prince Dakkar and who was no longer even Captain Nemo.

Harbert and Pencroff were crying. Ayrton wiped away a furtive tear. Nab was kneeling beside the reporter, who had turned to stone.

Cyrus Smith, raising his hand above the dead man's head:

"May God have mercy on his soul!" he said, and, turning to his friends, he added:

"Let us pray for the one we have lost!"

A few hours later, the colonists fulfilled the promise made to the captain; they carried out the last wishes of the dead man.

Cyrus Smith and his companions left the Nautilus, having taken with them the only memento their benefactor had left them, that casket which contained one hundred fortunes.

The wonderful salon, always flooded with light, had been carefully closed. The sheet metal door of the hatch was then bolted shut, so that

not a drop of water could penetrate the interior of the Nautilus's chambers.

Then the colonists descended into the canoe, which was moored to the side of the submarine.

This boat was taken to the rear. There, at the waterline, two large valves were opened which were connected to the tanks used to determine the depth of the device.

These taps were opened, the tanks filled, and the Nautilus, sinking little by little, disappeared beneath the sheet of water.

But the colonists were still able to follow it through the deep layers. Its powerful light illuminated the transparent waters, while the crypt grew dark again. Then, this vast outpouring of electrical currents finally faded away, and soon the Nautilus, now the coffin of Captain Nemo, rested at the bottom of the sea.

CHAPTER XVIII

At daybreak, the colonists silently returned to the cave entrance, which they named "Dakkar Crypt" in memory of Captain Nemo. The tide was low, and they easily passed under the arch, whose basalt pier lapped against the water's edge.

The tin boat remained in that spot, and in such a way that it was sheltered from the waves. As an added precaution, Pencroff, Nab and Ayrton hauled it onto the small beach that bordered one side of the crypt, to a place where it was in no danger.

The storm had ceased with nightfall. The last rumbles of thunder were fading away in the west.

It was no longer raining, but the sky was still heavy with clouds. In short, this October, the beginning of the southern spring, was not shaping up in a satisfactory way, and the wind had a tendency to jump from one point of the compass to another, which made it impossible to rely on consistent weather.

Cyrus Smith and his companions, upon leaving the Dakkar crypt, had resumed their journey to the corral.

Along the way, Nab and Harbert carefully untied the wire that the captain had strung between the corral and the crypt, which could be used later. As they walked, the colonists spoke little. The various incidents of the night of October 15th-16th had deeply affected them. This stranger whose influence had protected them so effectively, this man whom their imagination had made a genius, Captain Nemo, was no more. He and his Nautilus were buried at the bottom of an abyss. It seemed to each of them that they were more isolated than before. They

had, so to speak, grown accustomed to relying on the powerful intervention that they now lacked, and Gideon Spilett and Cyrus Smith himself were not immune to this feeling. And so they all maintained a profound silence as they followed the path to the corral.

Around nine o'clock in the morning, the settlers had returned to Granite-House.

It had been agreed that the ship's construction would be pursued very actively, and Cyrus Smith devoted more time and care to it than ever before. No one knew what the future held. However, it was a guarantee for the colonists to have at their disposal a sturdy vessel, capable of withstanding even rough seas, and large enough to attempt, if necessary, a crossing of some duration. If, once the ship was completed, the colonists did not yet decide to leave Lincoln Island and reach either a Polynesian archipelago in the Pacific or the shores of New Zealand, they must at least go to Tabor Island as soon as possible to deposit the notice concerning Ayrton. This was an essential precaution to take in case the Scottish yacht reappeared in those waters, and nothing could be neglected in this regard.

Work resumed. Cyrus Smith, Pencroff, and Ayrton, assisted by Nab, Gideon Spilett, and Harbert, worked tirelessly whenever some other pressing task didn't demand their attention. The new vessel had to be

ready in five months, that is, by the beginning of March, if they were to visit Tabor Island before the equinoctial gales made the crossing impassable. So the carpenters wasted no time. Besides, they didn't have to worry about building rigging, since that of the speedy had been entirely salvaged. Therefore, the hull of the ship had to be completed first and foremost.

The end of 1868 passed amidst this important work, almost to the exclusion of all others. After two and a half months, the frames had been put in place, and the first planks were fitted. It was already clear that the plans provided by Cyrus Smith were excellent, and that the ship would perform well at sea. Pencroff brought a voracious energy to this work and didn't hesitate to grumble when someone else abandoned the carpenter's axe for the hunter's rifle. It was, however, essential to maintain the stores at Granite-House in preparation for the coming winter.

But no matter. The brave sailor was not happy when there was a shortage of workers at the shipyard. On those occasions, grumbling all the while, he would angrily do the work of six men.

The entire summer season was bad. For a few days, the heat was oppressive, and the atmosphere, saturated with electricity, discharged itself only through violent storms that deeply disturbed the air. It was

rare that distant rumbles of thunder weren't heard. It was like a low, but constant murmur, such as occurs in the equatorial regions of the globe.

1 , 1869, was marked by an extremely violent storm, and lightning struck the island several times. Large trees were hit and snapped by the lightning, including one of the enormous hackberry trees that shaded the farmyard at the southern end of the lake. Did this storm have any connection with the phenomena occurring deep within the earth? Was there some kind of link between the disturbances in the air and the disturbances in the interior of the globe? Cyrus Smith was inclined to believe so, because the development of these storms was marked by a resurgence of volcanic activity.

It was on January 3rd that Harbert, having climbed at dawn to the Grande-vue plateau to saddle one of the onaggas, saw an enormous plume unfurling at the summit of the volcano.

Harbert immediately warned the settlers, who came at once to observe the summit of Mount Franklin.

"Hey!" cried Pencroff, "it's not vapors this time! It seems to me that the giant is not only breathing, but smoking!"

This image, used by the sailor, perfectly captured the change that had occurred at the mouth of the volcano. For three months already, the

crater had been emitting vapors of varying intensity, but these had previously only originated from the internal boiling of mineral matter. This time, the vapors had been replaced by a thick smoke, rising in the form of a grayish column, more than three hundred feet wide at its base, and which spread out like an immense mushroom to a height of seven to eight hundred feet above the summit of the mountain.

"The fire is in the fireplace," said Gideon Spilett.

"And we won't be able to turn it off!" replied Harbert.

"We should really clean out the volcanoes," observed Nab, who seemed to be speaking with the utmost seriousness.

"Well, Nab," cried Pencroff. "Are you going to take care of that chimney sweeping?"

And Pencroff burst into a loud laugh.

Cyrus Smith watched intently the thick smoke billowing from Mount Franklin, and he even strained his ears, as if trying to catch some distant rumbling. Then, returning to his companions, from whom he had strayed somewhat:

“Indeed, my friends, a significant change has occurred, we must not deceive ourselves about it. The volcanic materials are no longer merely

boiling, they have caught fire, and, most certainly, we are threatened with an imminent eruption!”

"Well, Mr. Smith, we'll see the eruption," cried Pencroff, "and we'll applaud it if it's successful! I don't think there's anything to worry about!"

“No, Pencroff,” replied Cyrus Smith, “for the old lava flow is still open, and, thanks to its configuration, the crater has thus far channeled the lava northward. And yet…”

— And yet, since there is no advantage to be gained from an eruption, it would be better if it did not take place, said the reporter.

"Who knows?" replied the sailor. "Perhaps there is some useful and precious substance in that volcano that it will willingly spew forth, and which we will put to good use!"

Cyrus Smith shook his head like a man who expected nothing good from the phenomenon whose development was so sudden. He did not consider the consequences of an eruption as lightly as Pencroff. While the lava, due to the crater's orientation, did not directly threaten the wooded and cultivated parts of the island, other complications could arise. Indeed, eruptions are often accompanied by earthquakes, and an island like Lincoln Island, composed of such diverse materials—basalt on one side, granite on the other, lava in the north, loose soil in the

south—materials which, consequently, could not be firmly bound together, would have been at risk of being disintegrated. Thus, while the outpouring of volcanic material did not constitute a very serious danger, any movement in the Earth's structure that shook the island could have extremely grave consequences.

"It seems to me," said Ayrton, who had lain down with his ear to the ground, "it seems to me I hear dull rumbling sounds, like a cart loaded with iron bars."

The colonists listened with extreme attention and could see that Ayrton was not mistaken. The rolling sounds were sometimes mingled with subterranean roars that formed a kind of "rinfordzando".

And they gradually faded away, as if some violent breeze had passed through the depths of the globe.

But no actual detonation was yet heard. It could therefore be concluded that the vapors and fumes were finding free passage through the central chimney, and that, the valve being large enough, no dislocation would occur, no explosion was to be feared.

“Ah, well then!” said Pencroff, “aren’t we going back to work? Let Mount Franklin smoke, bellow, groan, and vomit fire and flames all it wants, that’s no reason to do nothing! Come on, Ayrton, Nab, Harbert, Mr. Cyrus, Mr. Spilett, everyone has to pitch in today! We’re going to

adjust the sternposts, and a dozen extra hands won't be too many. In two months, I want our new Bonadventure—for we shall keep that name, shall we not?—floating on the waters of the balloon harbor! So, not an hour to lose!"

All the colonists, whose labor was needed by Pencroff, went down to the construction site and proceeded to lay the wales, the thick planks that form the perimeter of a building and securely connect the frames of its structure. It was a large and arduous task, in which everyone had to participate.

They worked diligently throughout the day of January 3rd, without paying any attention to the volcano, which, moreover, could not be seen from the beach at Granite House. But once or twice, large shadows, veiling the sun as it traced its diurnal arc across an exceptionally clear sky, indicated that a thick cloud of smoke was passing between its disk and the island. The wind, blowing from the open sea, carried all these vapors westward. Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett clearly noticed these passing darkenings and repeatedly attributed the evident progress of the volcanic activity to them, but the work was not interrupted.

It was, moreover, of paramount importance, from every point of view, that the building be completed as quickly as possible. In the event of unforeseen circumstances, the colonists' safety would be all the better

guaranteed. Who knows if this ship might not one day be their only refuge?

In the evening, after supper, Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett and Harbert returned to the Grande-vue plateau. Night had already fallen, and the darkness should allow them to determine whether the vapors and fumes accumulated at the mouth of the crater were mixed with flames or incandescent material ejected by the volcano.

"The crater is on fire!" cried Harbert, who, being more agile than his companions, had arrived first at the plateau.

Mount Franklin, some six miles away, then appeared like a gigantic torch, at the summit of which a few sooty flames writhed. So much smoke, so much slag and ash perhaps, were mixed in, that their very muted glow did not stand out sharply against the darkness of the night. But a kind of tawny glow spread over the island and indistinctly outlined the wooded mass in the foreground. Immense swirls obscured the upper reaches of the sky, through which a few stars twinkled.

"Progress is rapid!" said the engineer.

"That's not surprising," replied the reporter. "The volcano has been active for some time now. You remember, Cyrus, that the first vapors appeared around the time we searched the mountain's foothills to find

Captain Nemo's hideout. That was, if I'm not mistaken, around October 15th?"

— Yes! replied Harbert, and that was two and a half months ago!

"So the underground fires have been smoldering for ten weeks," continued Gideon Spilett, "and it's no wonder they're now developing with such violence!"

"Don't you feel certain vibrations in the ground?" asked Cyrus Smith.

"Indeed," replied Gideon Spilett, "but to go from that to an earthquake..."

“I don’t say we’re threatened by an earthquake,” replied Cyrus Smith, “and heaven forbid! No. These vibrations are due to the effervescence of the central fire. The Earth’s crust is nothing more than the wall of a boiler, and you know that the wall of a boiler, under the pressure of the gases, vibrates like a sounding plate. That’s the effect that’s occurring right now.”

"The magnificent bursts of fire!" exclaimed Harbert.

At that moment, a kind of fireworks display burst from the crater, its brilliance undiminished by the fumes. Thousands of luminous fragments and bright points shot out in opposite directions. Some, rising above the dome of smoke, pierced it with a swift jet, leaving

behind a veritable incandescent dust. This explosion was accompanied by successive detonations, like the bursting of a machine-gun battery.

Cyrus Smith, the reporter, and the young boy, after spending an hour on the Grande-vue plateau, descended back to the shore and returned to Granite-House. The engineer was pensive, even preoccupied, to such an extent that Gideon Spilett felt compelled to ask him if he sensed any imminent danger, of which the eruption would be the direct or indirect cause.

“Yes and no,” replied Cyrus Smith.

— However, continued the reporter, wouldn't the greatest misfortune that could befall us be an earthquake that would devastate the island? But I don't believe that's anything to fear, since the vapors and lava have found a free passage to flow outwards.

“So,” replied Cyrus Smith, “I do not fear an earthquake in the sense that is ordinarily given to the convulsions of the ground caused by the expansion of subterranean vapors. But other causes can bring about great disasters.”

— Which ones, my dear Cyrus?

"I don't really know... I need to see... I need to visit the mountain... I'll know for sure in a few days."

Gideon Spilett did not insist, and soon, despite the detonations of the volcano, whose intensity increased and which were repeated by the echoes of the island, the guests of Granite-House were sleeping a deep sleep.

Three days passed, January 4th, 5th, and 6th. Work continued on the construction of the boat, and, without further explanation, the engineer intensified the work with all his might. Mount Franklin was then shrouded in a dark, sinister-looking cloud, and along with the flames, it spewed forth incandescent rocks, some of which fell back into the crater itself. This prompted Pencroff, who wished to consider the phenomenon only from its amusing aspects, to remark:

"Look! The giant playing with a cup-and-ball game! The giant juggling!"

And indeed, the vomited material fell back into the abyss, and it did not appear that the lava, swollen by internal pressure, had yet risen to the crater's opening. At least, the northeastern vent, which was partly visible, was not pouring any torrent onto the northern slope of the mountain.

However, no matter how urgent the construction work was, other concerns required the presence of settlers at various points on the island.

First and foremost, they had to go to the corral, where the herd of mouflon and goats was kept, and replenish their fodder. It was then agreed that Ayrton would go there the following day, January 7th, and since he could manage this task alone, a job he was accustomed to doing, Pencroff and the others expressed some surprise when they heard the engineer say to Ayrton:

"Since you are going to the corral tomorrow, I will accompany you there.

"Hey! Mr. Cyrus!" cried the sailor, "our working days are numbered, and if you leave too, that will mean four fewer arms for us!"

"We will be back the next day," replied Cyrus Smith, "but I need to go to the corral... I wish to know where the eruption is at."

"The eruption! The eruption!" replied Pencroff, sounding rather dissatisfied. "This eruption is something important, and yet it doesn't worry me much!"

Whatever the sailor might have thought, the exploration, planned by the engineer, was maintained for the next day. Harbert would have liked to accompany Cyrus Smith, but he did not want to upset Pencroff by being absent.

The next day, at daybreak, Cyrus Smith and Ayrton, mounting the wagon drawn by the two onaggas, set off for the corral and raced there

at a brisk trot. Above the forest passed heavy clouds, to which the crater of Mount Franklin incessantly supplied sooty matter. These clouds, which rolled heavily through the atmosphere, were clearly composed of heterogeneous substances. It was not solely the smoke from the volcano that made them so strangely opaque and heavy. Dusty scoria, such as pulverized pozzolana and grayish ash as fine as the finest starch, remained suspended amidst their thick plumes. This ash is so fine that it has sometimes been observed to remain suspended in the air for months on end. After the 1783 eruption in Iceland, for more than a year the atmosphere was thus filled with volcanic dust that the sun's rays barely penetrated.

But, more often than not, these pulverized materials settle back down, and that is what happened on this occasion.

Cyrus Smith and Ayrton had barely reached the corral when a sort of blackish snow, like light powder, fell and instantly changed the appearance of the ground. Trees, meadows, everything disappeared under a layer several inches thick. But, very fortunately, the wind was blowing from the northeast, and most of the cloud dissipated over the sea.

"That's peculiar, Mr. Smith," said Ayrton.

"That's serious," replied the engineer. "This pozzolana, these pulverized pumice stones, all this mineral dust in short, demonstrates how deep the disturbance is in the lower layers of the volcano."

— But is there nothing to be done?

"Nothing, except to observe the progress of the phenomenon. So, Ayrton, you attend to the corral. Meanwhile, I will go up beyond the sources of the Red Creek and examine the condition of the mountain on its northern slope. Then..."

— Then... Mr. Smith?

"Then we'll visit the Dakkar crypt... I want to see it... anyway, I'll come back to pick you up in two hours."

Ayrton then entered the corral yard, and, while waiting for the engineer to return, he took care of the mouflons and goats, who seemed to be experiencing some discomfort in the face of these first symptoms of an eruption.

However, Cyrus Smith, having ventured onto the crest of the eastern foothills, turned the red creek and arrived at the place where he and his companions had discovered a sulphurous spring during their first exploration.

Things had certainly changed! Instead of a single column of smoke, he counted thirteen shooting out of the ground, as if violently propelled by some piston. It was clear that the Earth's crust was under tremendous pressure at this point on the globe. The atmosphere was saturated with sulfurous gases, hydrogen, and carbonic acid, mixed with aqueous vapors. Cyrus Smith could feel the volcanic tuffs that dotted the plain, which were nothing but powdery ash that time had hardened into solid blocks, but he saw no trace of new lava yet.

This was what the engineer was able to ascertain more fully when he observed the entire northern slope of Mount Franklin. Whirls of smoke and flames escaped from the crater; a hail of scoria fell on the ground; but no lava flow occurred through the neck of the crater, which proved that the level of volcanic material had not yet reached the upper opening of the central vent.

"And I wish it were so!" Cyrus Smith thought. "At least I would be certain that the lava had resumed its usual course. Who knows if it might not pour forth from some new mouth? But that is not the danger! Captain Nemo sensed that! No! The danger is not there!"

Cyrus Smith advanced to the enormous causeway whose extension framed the narrow Shark Bay. From this side, he was able to examine

the ancient lava streaks sufficiently. He had no doubt that the last eruption dated back to a very distant past.

So he retraced his steps, listening to the subterranean rumblings that spread like continuous thunder, punctuated by brilliant detonations. At nine o'clock in the morning, he was back at the corral.

Ayrton was waiting for him.

"The animals are provided for, Mr. Smith," said Ayrton.

— Okay, Ayrton.

— They seem worried, Mr. Smith.

— Yes, instinct speaks in them, and instinct does not deceive.

— Whenever you want...

"Take a lantern and a lighter, Ayrton," replied the engineer, "and let's go."

Ayrton did as he was ordered. The unharnessed onaggas wandered in the corral. The gate was closed from the outside, and Cyrus Smith, preceding Ayrton, took the narrow path westward that led to the coast.

They both walked on ground muffled by the powdery material that had fallen from the cloud. No four-legged creatures were visible in the undergrowth. Even the birds had fled. Sometimes, a passing breeze stirred the layer of ash, and the two settlers, caught in an opaque

whirlwind, could no longer see each other. They were careful then to cover their eyes and mouths with a handkerchief, for they risked being blinded and suffocated.

Cyrus Smith and Ayrton could not, under these conditions, walk quickly. Moreover, the air was heavy, as if its oxygen had been partially burned and it had become unfit for breathing.

Every hundred steps, they had to stop and catch their breath. It was therefore after ten o'clock when the engineer and his companion reached the crest of this enormous pile of basaltic and porphyritic rocks which formed the northwest coast of the island.

Ayrton and Cyrus Smith began to descend the steep slope, following roughly the same dreadful path that, during that stormy night, had led them to the Dakkar crypt. In broad daylight, the descent was less perilous, and, moreover, the layer of ash covering the polished rocks provided a firmer footing on their sloping surfaces.

The shoulder extending from the shore, at a height of about forty feet, was soon reached. Cyrus Smith recalled that this shoulder sloped gently down to sea level. Although the tide was low at that moment, no beach was exposed, and the waves, fouled by volcanic dust, came crashing directly against the basalt of the shoreline.

Cyrus Smith and Ayrton easily found the opening of the Dakkar crypt, and they stopped under the last rock, which formed the lower ledge of the shoulder.

"The sheet metal boat must be there?" said the engineer.

"There it is, Mr. Smith," replied Ayrton, pulling the light boat towards him, which was sheltered under the arch of the arcade.

"Let's get on board, Ayrton."

The two colonists embarked in the canoe. A slight ripple in the waves carried it deeper under the low arch of the crypt, and there, Ayrton, after striking the flint, lit the lantern. Then, he grasped the two oars, and the lantern, having been placed on the bow of the canoe so as to project its beams forward, Cyrus Smith took the helm and steered into the darkness of the crypt.

The Nautilus was no longer there to set this dark cavern ablaze with its fires. Perhaps the electrical radiation, still fueled by its powerful core, was still spreading to the bottom of the waters, but no glimmer emerged from the abyss where Captain Nemo lay.

The light from the lantern, though insufficient, nevertheless allowed the engineer to advance, following the right wall of the crypt. A sepulchral silence reigned under this vault, at least in its front portion,

for soon Cyrus Smith distinctly heard the rumblings emanating from the bowels of the mountain.

"It's the volcano," he said.

Soon, along with the noise, the chemical combinations betrayed themselves with a strong odor, and sulfurous vapors caught the engineer and his companion by the throat.

"That's what Captain Nemo feared!" murmured Cyrus Smith, his face paling slightly. "We must, however, see this through to the end."

"Come on!" replied Ayrton, who bent over his oars and pushed the canoe towards the head of the crypt.

Twenty-five minutes after passing through the opening, the canoe reached the terminal wall and stopped.

Cyrus Smith, then climbing onto his bench, moved the lantern along the various sections of the wall that separated the crypt from the central vent of the volcano. What was the thickness of this wall?

Whether it was a hundred feet or ten, one could not tell. But the underground noises were too perceptible for it to be very thick.

The engineer, after exploring the wall along a horizontal line, fixed the lantern to the end of an oar, and he moved it again to a greater height on the basalt wall.

There, through barely visible cracks, across the poorly joined prisms, acrid smoke seeped out, infecting the atmosphere of the cavern. Fractures streaked the wall, and some, more vividly drawn, descended to within only two or three feet of the waters of the crypt.

Cyrus Smith remained thoughtful at first. Then he murmured these words again:

"Yes! The captain was right! That's where the danger lies, and a terrible danger at that!"

Ayrton said nothing, but, at a sign from Cyrus Smith, he took up his oars again, and, half an hour later, he and the engineer were leaving the Dakkar crypt.

CHAPTER XIX

The following morning, January 8th, after a day and night spent in the corral, with everything in order, Cyrus Smith and Ayrton returned to Granite House. Immediately, the engineer gathered his companions and informed them that Lincoln Island was in immense danger, which no human power could avert.

"My friends," he said, — and his voice betrayed a deep emotion, — "Lincoln Island is not one of those destined to last as long as the globe

itself. It is doomed to destruction, sooner or later, the cause of which lies within it, and from which nothing can save it!"

The colonists looked at each other and then at the engineer.

They couldn't understand it.

"Explain yourself, Cyrus!" said Gideon Spilett.

"Let me explain," replied Cyrus Smith, "or rather, I will only pass on to you the explanation that Captain Nemo gave me during our few minutes of secret conversation."

"Captain Nemo!" cried the colonists.

— Yes, and it was the last service he wanted to do for us before he died!

"The last service!" cried Pencroff. "The last service! You'll see that, dead though he is, he'll do us many more!"

"But what did Captain Nemo tell you?" asked the reporter.

"Know this, my friends," replied the engineer. "Lincoln Island is not in the same condition as the other Pacific islands, and a particular feature that Captain Nemo has made known to me will sooner or later cause the disintegration of its underwater structure."

"A dislocation! Lincoln Island! Come on!" cried Pencroff, who, despite all the respect he had for Cyrus Smith, could not help but shrug his

shoulders.

“Listen to me, Pencroff,” the engineer continued. “Here is what Captain Nemo observed, and what I myself observed yesterday during my exploration of the Dakkar crypt. This crypt extends beneath the island to the volcano, and it is separated from the central vent only by the wall that closes off its end. Now, this wall is riddled with fractures and fissures that are already allowing the sulfurous gases produced inside the volcano to escape.”

"Well?" asked Pencroff, whose forehead was furrowing violently.

— Well, I recognized that these fractures were widening under internal pressure, that the basalt wall was gradually cracking, and that, in a more or less short time, it would give way to the waters of the sea with which the cavern is filled.

"Good!" replied Pencroff, trying to joke again. "The sea will extinguish the volcano, and it will all be over!"

“Yes, it will all be over!” replied Cyrus Smith. “The day the sea rushes through the wall and penetrates through the central chimney to the bowels of the island, where the eruptive material boils, on that day, Pencroff, Lincoln Island will explode as Sicily would explode if the Mediterranean rushed into Etna!”

The colonists made no reply to the engineer's emphatic statement. They understood the danger that threatened them.

It must be said, moreover, that Cyrus Smith was not exaggerating in any way. Many people have already entertained the idea that volcanoes, almost all of which rise on the shores of seas or lakes, could perhaps be extinguished by opening up their waters. But they did not realize that this would expose oneself to the risk of exploding a part of the globe, like a boiler whose steam is suddenly energized by a blast of fire. The water, rushing into an enclosed space whose temperature can be estimated at thousands of degrees, would vaporize with such sudden force that no outer layer could withstand it.

It was therefore beyond doubt that the island, threatened with imminent and terrifying collapse, would only last as long as the wall of the Dakkar crypt itself remained standing. It wasn't even a matter of months or weeks, but a matter of days, perhaps even hours!

The colonists' first feeling was one of profound sorrow! They did not think of the peril that directly threatened them, but of the destruction of this land that had given them refuge, of this island that they had made fertile, of this island that they loved, that they wanted to make so flourishing one day!

So much wasted effort, so much wasted work!

Pencroff could not hold back a large tear which slid down his cheek, and which he did not try to hide.

The conversation continued for some time longer. The chances to which the colonists could still cling were discussed; but, in conclusion, it was recognized that there was not an hour to lose, that the construction and fitting out of the ship had to be pursued with prodigious energy, and that there, now, was the only chance of salvation for the inhabitants of Lincoln Island!

All hands were therefore required. What would have been the point now of harvesting, gathering, hunting, or increasing the reserves at Granite-House? What the storehouse and the offices still contained would be more than enough to supply the ship for a crossing, however long it might be! What was needed was that it be at the colonists' disposal before the inevitable catastrophe occurred.

Work resumed with feverish zeal. By January 23rd, the ship was half-planked. Until then, no changes had occurred at the summit of the volcano. Vapors and smoke, mingled with flames and pierced by incandescent stones, continued to escape from the crater. But during the night of the 23rd to the 24th, under the force of the lava, which reached the level of the volcano's first stage, the cone that formed its cap was torn off. A terrifying noise resounded. The colonists initially

thought the island was disintegrating. They rushed out of Granite House.

It was about two o'clock in the morning.

The sky was on fire. The upper cone — a massive structure a thousand feet high, weighing billions of pounds — had been hurled onto the island, whose ground trembled.

Fortunately, the cone tilted to the north and fell onto the plain of sand and tuff that stretched between the volcano and the sea. The crater, now wide open, projected such intense light into the sky that, simply by the effect of reflection, the atmosphere seemed incandescent. At the same time, a torrent of lava, swelling at the new summit, poured forth in long cascades, like water escaping from an overflowing basin, and a thousand fiery serpents crawled down the slopes of the volcano.

"The corral! The corral!" cried Ayrton.

Indeed, the lava was flowing towards the corral, due to the orientation of the new crater, and consequently, the fertile parts of the island, the sources of the Red Creek, and the jacamar groves were threatened with immediate destruction. At Ayrton's cry, the settlers rushed towards the onagga stable. The wagon had been harnessed. They all had but one thought: to run to the corral and set the animals free within.

Before three in the morning, they had reached the corral. Terrifying howls clearly indicated the horror that gripped the mouflon and goats. Already, a torrent of incandescent material, of liquefied minerals, was cascading down from the buttress onto the meadow and eroding that side of the palisade. Ayrton abruptly opened the gate, and the panicked animals scattered in all directions. An hour later, the boiling lava filled the corral, vaporized the water of the small stream that ran through it, set fire to the dwelling, which burned like stubble, and devoured the palisaded enclosure down to the last post. Nothing remained of the corral!

The colonists had wanted to fight against this invasion, they had tried, but foolishly and uselessly, because man is defenseless in the face of these great cataclysms.

The day had come—January 24th. Cyrus Smith and his companions, before returning to Granite House, wanted to observe the final direction this lava flow would take. The general slope of the land descended from Mount Franklin to the east coast, and it was feared that, despite the thick Jacamar woods, the torrent might spread as far as the Grande Vue plateau.

"The lake will cover us," said Gideon Spilett.

"I hope so!" replied Cyrus Smith, and that was his entire answer.

The settlers had hoped to advance to the plain where the upper cone of Mount Franklin had collapsed, but lava blocked their path. The lava flowed along the Red Creek Valley on one side and the Falls River Valley on the other, vaporizing both waterways in its wake. Crossing the torrent was impossible; they had to retreat. The volcano, its summit stump shattered, was no longer recognizable. A kind of flat surface now marked its end, replacing the old crater. Two vents, hollowed out at its southern and eastern edges, ceaselessly poured forth lava, creating two distinct streams. Above the new crater, a cloud of smoke and ash mingled with the vapors in the sky, gathered above the island. Loud crashes of thunder erupted and blended with the rumblings of the mountain. From its mouth erupted igneous rocks which, hurled more than a thousand feet, exploded in the sky and scattered like shrapnel. The sky responded to the volcanic eruption with flashes of lightning.

Around seven o'clock in the morning, the position became untenable for the settlers, who had taken refuge at the edge of the jacamar forest. Not only were projectiles beginning to rain down around them, but lava, overflowing from the bed of the red creek, threatened to cut off the road to the corral. The first rows of trees caught fire, and their sap, suddenly transformed into steam, caused them to explode like fireworks, while others, less damp, remained intact amidst the flood.

The settlers had resumed their journey to the corral. They walked slowly, almost backwards.

But, due to the slope of the ground, the torrent rapidly advanced eastward, and, as soon as the lower layers of lava had hardened, other bubbling sheets immediately covered them.

However, the main stream in the Red Creek valley was becoming increasingly threatening. This entire section of the forest was ablaze, and enormous plumes of smoke rolled over the trees, whose bases were already crackling in the lava.

The settlers stopped near the lake, half a mile from the mouth of the red creek. A matter of life or death was about to be decided for them.

Cyrus Smith, accustomed to quantifying serious situations, and knowing that he was addressing men capable of hearing the truth, whatever it might be, then said:

"Either the lake will stop this current, and part of the island will be spared complete devastation, or the current will flood the forests of the Far West, and not a tree, not a plant will remain on the surface of the soil. On these bare rocks, we will have nothing but a death that the island's explosion will bring us sooner rather than later!"

"So," cried Pencroff, crossing his arms and stamping his foot on the ground, "there's no point in working on the boat, is there?"

"Pencroff," replied Cyrus Smith, "one must do one's duty to the very end!"

At that moment, the river of lava, having carved its way through the beautiful trees it was devouring, reached the edge of the lake. There was a certain rise in the ground which, had it been more considerable, might perhaps have been enough to contain the torrent.

"Let's get to work!" cried Cyrus Smith.

The engineer's thought was immediately understood.

This torrent, it was necessary to dam it, so to speak, and thus force it to flow into the lake.

The settlers rushed to the construction site. They brought back shovels, picks, and axes, and there, by means of earthworks and felled trees, they managed, in a few hours, to raise a dike three feet high and several hundred paces long. It seemed to them, when they had finished, that they had only worked for a few minutes!

It was about time. The liquefied material reached the lower part of the shoulder almost immediately. The river swelled like a raging river about to overflow its banks and threatened to surpass the only obstacle that could prevent it from invading the entire Far West... But the dike managed to contain it, and, after a minute of hesitation that was terrifying, it plunged into Grant Lake down a twenty-foot drop.

The colonists, breathless, watched this struggle of the two elements without moving or uttering a word. What a spectacle this battle between water and fire was! What pen could describe this scene of wondrous horror, and what brush could paint it? The water hissed as it evaporated on contact with the boiling lava. The vapors, hurled into the air, swirled to an immeasurable height, as if the valves of an immense boiler had suddenly been opened.

But, however considerable the mass of water contained in the lake, it was bound to be absorbed eventually, since it did not renew itself, while the torrent, fed by an inexhaustible source, constantly carried new streams of incandescent matter.

The first lava flows that fell into the lake solidified immediately and accumulated, soon emerging into the sea. Other lava flows slid across their surface, turning to stone in turn, but progressing towards the center. A jetty thus formed, threatening to fill the lake, which could not overflow because its excess water was dissipated as vapor. Hissing and crackling sounds ripped through the air with a deafening noise, and the vapors, carried by the wind, fell back as rain onto the sea. The jetty grew longer, and the solidified lava blocks piled one upon another. Where once tranquil waters had stretched, an enormous heap of steaming rocks now appeared, as if an upheaval of the earth had

brought forth thousands of reefs. Imagine these waters churned up during a hurricane, then suddenly frozen solid by a cold of twenty degrees, and you will have the appearance of the lake, three hours after the irresistible torrent burst into it.

This time, water had to be defeated by fire.

However, it was fortunate for the colonists that the lava flow had been directed toward Grant Lake. They had a few days of respite. The Grande-vue plateau, Granite-House, and the construction site were temporarily spared. These few days had to be used to carefully plan and caulk the ship. Then, it would be launched, and they would take refuge there, perhaps even rigging it, once it was back in its element. With the fear of an explosion threatening to destroy the island, there was no longer any safety in remaining ashore. This refuge of Granite-House, so secure until then, could at any moment close its granite walls in!

For the next six days, from January 25th to 30th, the colonists worked on the ship as hard as twenty men could have. They scarcely took any rest, and the brilliance of the flames leaping from the crater kept them going day and night. The volcanic eruption continued, though perhaps less abundantly. This was fortunate, for Grant Lake was almost entirely filled, and if new lava had flowed over the surface of the old, it would

inevitably have spread across the Grande-vue plateau and from there onto the shore.

But while the island was partly protected on this side, the same could not be said of its western portion. Indeed, the second lava flow, which had followed the valley of the river at the waterfall—a wide valley whose terrain sloped downwards on either side of the creek—found no obstacle. The incandescent liquid thus spread through the Far-West forest. At this time of year, when the trees were parched by the scorching heat, the forest caught fire instantly, so that the blaze spread both from the base of the trunks and through the upper branches, whose intertwining helped the conflagration progress. It even seemed that the flames raged faster in the treetops than the lava flow at their base.

It so happened that the animals, panicked, wild beasts and others—jaguars, wild boars, capybaras, koulas, game birds and furred creatures—sought refuge near the Mercy River and in the shelduck marsh beyond the Port Ballon road. But the settlers were too busy with their work to pay attention even to the most fearsome of these animals. Besides, they had abandoned Granite House; they hadn't even bothered to seek shelter in the chimneys, and they were camping in a tent near the mouth of the Mercy.

Every day, Cyrus Smith and Gideon Spilett climbed to the Grande-vue plateau. Sometimes Harbert accompanied them, but never Pencroff, who did not want to see the island in its new light, so profoundly devastated!

It was a desolate sight indeed. The entire wooded part of the island was now bare. A single clump of green trees stood at the tip of the serpentine peninsula. Here and there, a few blackened, branchless stumps grimaced. The site of the destroyed forests was drier than the shelduck marsh. The lava flow had been complete. Where that admirable greenery had once flourished, the soil was now nothing but a wild heap of volcanic tuff. The valleys of the Falls and Mercy rivers no longer poured a single drop of water into the sea, and the settlers would have had no way to quench their thirst had Grant Lake been completely dried up. But, fortunately, its southern tip had been spared and formed a kind of pond, containing all that remained of the island's potable water. To the northwest, the foothills of the volcano rose in sharp, jagged ridges, resembling a gigantic claw pressed into the ground. What a painful sight, what a dreadful aspect, and what regrets for these settlers, who, from a fertile estate covered in forests, watered by streams, and enriched with harvests, found themselves in an instant

transported to a devastated rock, where, without their supplies, they would not even have been able to survive!

"It breaks my heart!" said Gideon Spilett one day.

"Yes, Spilett," replied the engineer. "May heaven grant us the time to complete this building, now our only refuge!"

— Don't you think, Cyrus, that the volcano seems to be calming down? It's still spewing lava, but less abundantly, if I'm not mistaken!

“It doesn’t matter,” replied Cyrus Smith. “The fire still burns brightly in the mountain’s depths, and the sea could rush in at any moment. We are like passengers whose ship is being consumed by a fire they cannot extinguish, and who know that sooner or later it will be consigned to the powder magazine! Come, Spilett, come, and let us not waste another hour!”

For another eight days, that is, until February 7, the lava continued to spread, but the eruption remained within the indicated limits.

Cyrus Smith feared above all that the liquefied materials might spill onto the shore, and in that case, the construction site would not have been spared. However, around this time, the colonists felt vibrations in the island's framework that greatly alarmed them.

It was February 20th. It would be another month before the ship was ready to sail.

Would the island hold until then? Pencroff and Cyrus Smith intended to launch the ship as soon as its hull was sufficiently watertight. The deck, fittings, interior, and rigging would follow, but the important thing was that the colonists have a secure refuge off the island. It might even be advisable to take the ship to the balloon harbor, that is, as far away as possible from the volcanic center, because at the mouth of the Mercy River, between the islet and the granite wall, it risked being crushed if it broke apart. All the workers' efforts were therefore directed toward completing the hull.

They thus arrived at March 3rd, and they were able to estimate that the launch operation would take place in about ten days.

Hope returned to the hearts of these colonists, so sorely tested during this fourth year of their stay on Lincoln Island! Pencroff himself seemed to emerge somewhat from the dark taciturnity into which the ruin and devastation of his estate had plunged him. He was now thinking of nothing but that ship, on which all his hopes were pinned.

“We shall finish it,” he said to the engineer, “we shall finish it, Mr. Cyrus, and it is time, for the season is approaching, and we will soon be at the equinox. Well, if necessary, we shall put in at Tabor Island to

spend the winter! But Tabor Island after Lincoln Island! Ah! Woe to me! Would I ever have believed I would see such a thing!”

"Let's hurry!" the engineer would invariably reply.

And we worked without wasting a moment.

"My master," Nab asked a few days later, "if Captain Nemo had still been alive, do you think all this would have happened?"

— Yes, Nab, replied Cyrus Smith.

"Well, I don't believe it!" Pencroff whispered in Nab's ear.

"Neither me!" replied Nab seriously.

During the first week of March, Mount Franklin became menacing once more. Thousands of glassy threads, made of fluid lava, fell like rain to the ground. The crater filled again with lava that spilled over all sides of the volcano. The torrent raced across the surface of the hardened tuffs, finishing off the meager skeletons of trees that had survived the first eruption. The current, this time following the southwest shore of Grant Lake, carried its waters beyond Glycerin Creek and flooded the Grande-Vue plateau. This final blow to the settlers' work was terrible. Nothing remained of the mill, the farm buildings, or the stables. The birds, terrified, disappeared in all directions. Top and Jup showed signs of the greatest terror, and their instincts warned them that disaster was

imminent. Many of the island's animals had perished during the first eruption. Those who survived found no other refuge than the shelduck marsh, except for a few who found shelter on the Grande-Vue plateau. But this last refuge was finally closed to them, and the river of lava, overflowing the crest of the granite wall, began to hurl its fiery cataracts onto the shore. The sublime horror of this spectacle defies description. During the night, it was like a Niagara of molten iron, with its incandescent vapors above and its boiling masses below!

The colonists were forced into their last stand, and, although the upper seams of the ship were not yet caulked, they resolved to throw it into the sea!

Pencroff and Ayrton therefore proceeded with the preparations for the launch, which was to take place the following day, on the morning of March 9.

But during the night of the 8th to the 9th, an enormous column of vapors, escaping from the crater, rose amidst terrifying detonations to a height of over three thousand feet. The wall of the Dakkar cavern had evidently given way under the pressure of the gases, and the sea, rushing through the central vent into the molten chasm, suddenly vaporized. But the crater could not provide sufficient outlet for these vapors. An explosion, which could have been heard a hundred miles

away, shook the layers of the air. Pieces of mountains fell back into the Pacific, and, within minutes, the ocean covered the place where Lincoln Island had once stood.

CHAPTER XX

An isolated rock, thirty feet long, fifteen feet wide, barely ten feet above the water, was the only solid point that had not been invaded by the Pacific waves.

That was all that remained of the Granite House massif! The wall had been toppled, then dislodged, and some of the rocks from the great hall had piled up to form this summit. Everything else had vanished into the abyss around it: the lower cone of Mount Franklin, torn apart by the explosion, the lava jaws of Shark Gulf, the Grande-vue plateau, the Islet of Salvation, the Port-Ballon granites, the basalts of the Dakkar Crypt, the long serpentine peninsula, so far removed, however, from the eruptive center! From Lincoln Island, only this narrow rock, which then served as a refuge for the six settlers and their dog Top, was visible.

The animals had also perished in the disaster, the birds as well as the other representatives of the island's fauna, all crushed or drowned, and the unfortunate Jup himself had, alas! met his death in some crevice in the ground!

If Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Pencroff, Nab, Ayrton had survived, it was because, gathered then under their tent, they had been thrown into the sea, at the moment when the debris of the island rained down from all sides.

When they returned to the surface, all they could see, half a cable's length away, was this pile of rocks, towards which they swam, and on which they set foot.

It was on this bare rock that they had been living for nine days! A few provisions salvaged from the Granite House store before the disaster, a little fresh water that the rain had poured into a hollow in the rock—that was all the unfortunate souls possessed. Their last hope, their ship, had been wrecked. They had no way to leave this reef. No fire, nor anything to make one. They were destined to perish!

That day, March 18th, they only had enough preserves left for two days, even though they had consumed only the bare necessities. All their knowledge, all their intelligence, was useless in this situation. They were entirely in God's hands.

Cyrus Smith was calm. Gideon Spilett, more agitated, and Pencroff, seething with anger, paced back and forth on the rock. Harbert never left the engineer's side, watching him as if pleading for help he couldn't provide. Nab and Ayrton were resigned to their fate.

"Ah! Misery! Misery!" Pencroff often repeated! "If only we had a nutshell to take us to Tabor Island! But nothing, nothing!"

"Captain Nemo did well to die!" Nab once said.

For the next five days, Cyrus Smith and his unfortunate companions lived with the utmost frugality, eating only enough to avoid starvation. They were extremely weak. Harbert and Nab began to show signs of delirium.

In this situation, could they retain even a glimmer of hope? No! What was their only chance? That a ship would pass within sight of the reef? But they knew full well, from experience, that ships never visited this part of the Pacific! Could they count on the Scottish yacht arriving at Tabor Island precisely at that time to search for Ayrton? It was improbable, and besides, even assuming it did come, since the colonists had been unable to leave a report indicating any changes in Ayrton's situation, the yacht's captain, after searching the islet without success, would put to sea again and head for lower latitudes.

No! They could retain no hope of being saved, and a horrible death, death by hunger and thirst, awaited them on that rock!

And already they lay motionless on the rock, unaware of what was happening around them. Only Ayrton, with a supreme effort, still raised his head and cast a desperate glance at the deserted sea!

But then, on the morning of March 24th, Ayrton's arms stretched out towards a point in space; he rose, first to his knees, then to his feet, his hand seeming to signal... a ship was in sight of the island! This ship was not sailing the seas aimlessly. The reef was its destination, and it was heading straight for it, pushing its steam to its limits. The unfortunate souls would have seen it several hours earlier, had they still had the strength to watch the horizon!

"The Duncan!" murmured Ayrton, and he fell back motionless.

When Cyrus Smith and his companions regained consciousness, thanks to the care they received, they found themselves in a steamer's cabin, unable to understand how they had escaped death. A word from Ayrton was enough to explain everything.

"The Duncan!" he murmured.

"The Duncan!" replied Cyrus Smith.

And, raising his arms to the sky, he cried out:

"Ah! Almighty God! So you wanted us to be saved!"

It was indeed the Duncan, Lord Glenarvan's yacht, then commanded by Robert, Captain Grant's son, which had been sent to Tabor Island to search for Ayrton and bring him home after twelve years of penance!

The settlers were saved; they were already on their way back!

"Captain Robert," asked Cyrus Smith, "who could have given you the idea, after leaving Tabor Island, where you no longer found Ayrton, to sail a hundred miles northeast?"

"Mr. Smith," replied Robert Grant, "it was to fetch not only Ayrton, but you and your companions!"

— My companions and I?

— No doubt! On Lincoln Island!

"Lincoln Island!" exclaimed Gideon Spilett, Harbert, Nab, and Pencroff simultaneously, in utter astonishment.

"How do you know about Lincoln Island?" asked Cyrus Smith, "since that island isn't even shown on any maps?"

"I knew of it from the notice you left on Tabor Island," replied Robert Grant.

"A notice?" exclaimed Gideon Spilett.

"No doubt, and here it is," replied Robert Grant, presenting a document that indicated the longitude and latitude of Lincoln Island, "the current residence of Ayrton and five American settlers."

"Captain Nemo!" said Cyrus Smith, after reading the notice and recognizing that it was in the same hand that had written the document found at the corral!

"Ah!" said Pencroff, "so it was he who had taken our Bonadventure, he who had ventured, alone, all the way to Tabor Island!"

"To leave this notice there!" replied Harbert.

"So I was right to say," cried the sailor, "that even after his death, the captain would still do us one last service!"

"My friends," said Cyrus Smith in a deeply moved voice, "may the god of all mercy receive the soul of Captain Nemo, our savior!"

The colonists had revealed themselves at Cyrus Smith's last sentence and were murmuring the captain's name. At that moment, Ayrton, approaching the engineer, simply said to him:

"Where should I put this box?"

This was the box that Ayrton had saved at the risk of his life, at the moment when the island was being swallowed up, and which he had faithfully come to deliver to the engineer.

"Ayrton! Ayrton!" said Cyrus Smith with deep emotion.

Then, addressing Robert Grant:

"Sir," he added, "where you left a guilty man, you find a man whom expiation has made honest again, and to whom I am proud to extend my hand!"

Robert Grant was then informed of this strange story of Captain Nemo and the settlers of Lincoln Island. Then, after surveying what remained of this reef, which was now to be marked on Pacific charts, he gave the order to change course.

Fifteen days later, the colonists landed in America, returning to a peaceful homeland after the terrible war that had brought about the triumph of justice and law. Of the riches contained in the chest bequeathed by Captain Nemo to the colonists of Lincoln Island, the greater part was used to acquire a vast estate in the state of Iowa. Only one pearl, the most beautiful, was removed from this treasure and sent to Lady Glenarvan, on behalf of the shipwrecked sailors brought home by the Duncan.

There, on that land, the colonists called to work—that is, to fortune and happiness—all those to whom they had hoped to offer the hospitality of Lincoln Island. There was founded a vast colony, which they named after the island that had disappeared into the depths of the Pacific. There was a river there that was called the Mercy, a mountain that took the name Franklin, a small lake that became Grant Lake, and forests that became the forests of the Far West. It was like an island on the mainland.

There, under the intelligent hand of the engineer and his companions, everything prospered. Not one of the former settlers of Lincoln Island was missing, for they had sworn to always live together, Nab where his master was, Ayrton ready to sacrifice himself at any opportunity, Pencroff more farmer than he had ever been sailor, Harbert, whose studies were completed under the direction of Cyrus Smith, Gideon Spilett himself, who founded the New Lincoln Herald, which was the best-informed newspaper in the whole world.

There, Cyrus Smith and his companions received several visits from Lord and Lady Glenarvan, Captain John Mangles and his wife, sister of Robert Grant, Robert Grant himself, Major Mac Nabbs, and all those who had been involved in the double story of Captain Grant and Captain Nemo.

There, at last, they were all happy, united in the present as they had been in the past; but they were never to forget that island, on which they had arrived, poor and naked, that island which, for four years, had sufficed for their needs, and of which there remained only a piece of granite beaten by the waves of the Pacific, the tomb of the one who was Captain Nemo!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND ***

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